



President Barack Obama speaks during a meeting on veterans issues at the Phoenix VA Medical Center Friday, March 13, 2015. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

Fixes Come Slowly to ‘Corrosive Culture’ at VA Hospitals

**MICHAEL D. SHEAR
DAVE PHILIPPS
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PHOENIX - Nine months after President Barack Obama concluded that a “corrosive culture” had led to systemic problems at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the nation’s largest hospital system has made only halting progress

toward hiring new doctors, replacing incompetent supervisors, upgrading outdated computers and rebuilding trust with American veterans. Obama on Friday made his first visit to the department’s hospital in Phoenix since reports surfaced that officials there oversaw sham patient waiting lists

used to hide long delays in appointments. Several veterans died waiting for care there. Those delays set off a political crisis last summer that led to the ouster of the department’s chief and raised serious questions about the president’s ability to manage the sprawling bureaucracy.

Now, patients, veterans groups and doctors say delays in receiving care are still common, and they accuse VA officials of failing to provide opportunities to see private doctors. Critics, including Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill, say far too few senior managers have been held accountable for the mis-

management at the hospital in Phoenix and at others around the country. “Very little has changed,” said Dr. Sam Foote, an internist who was one of the first whistle-blowers to reveal problems with wait times at the Phoenix hospital.

Continued on page 3

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Making history: St. Patrick's parade welcomes 2 gay groups



Retired U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Eric Bullen, of Westborough, Mass., left, holds an American flag as U.S. Army veteran Ian Ryan, of Dennis, Mass., front right, rolls up an OutVets banner after marching with a group representing LGBT military veterans in a Veterans Day parade in Boston. The organizers of Boston's annual St. Patrick's Day parade voted to allow the group of gay veterans along with a second gay group, Boston Pride, to march in the parade scheduled to step off at 1 p.m., on Sunday, March 15, 2015. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

MARK PRATT
Associated Press
BOSTON (AP) — The St. Patrick's Day parade in Boston

will make history this Sunday as two gay and lesbian groups join the fun. The advocacy group Bos-

ton Pride and OutVets, a group of gay military veterans, have been welcomed by the organizers.

"This is a tremendous leap forward," Boston Pride organizer Sylvain Bruni said Friday.

Until now, gay rights groups have been barred by the South Boston Allied War Veterans Council from marching in the parade, which draws as many as a million spectators each year. Twenty years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the organizers' right to keep gays out.

But Brian Mahoney commands the council now, and he's shrugging off questions about sexual orientation.

Just like Pope Francis, he says, "Who am I to judge?" This Sunday's parade through the traditionally Irish-American enclave also will be shorter than years past: So much snow remains piled on sidewalks after the brutal winter that the city has had to cut the route in half.

And for the first time in two decades, a Boston mayor plans to be marching, too.

"With this year's parade, Boston is putting years of controversy behind us," Mayor Marty Walsh said Friday. Boston's mayors have boycotted the event since 1995, when the council took its fight to exclude gay groups all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and won. The justices ruled unanimously that it would violate the free speech rights of private citizens who organize a parade if they are forced to include a group that doesn't share its message.

"They're not going to shove something down our face that's not our traditional values," said the council's leader at the time, John "Wacko" Hurley, a year before the landmark 1995 ruling.

It would be eight more years before Massachusetts became the first state to legalize gay marriage, a trend that has since spread across most of the United States. Today, more than 70 percent of Americans live in states where gay marriage is allowed.

The council's current leaders voted 5-4 in December to welcome OutVets as one of about 100 groups in this year's parade. Boston Pride announced Friday that it also received an acceptance letter from the council this week.

"We're excited to be there," said Bryan Bishop, a 20-year U.S. Air Force veteran who founded the group representing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender veterans. "We've received nothing but positive feedback, from the mayor all the way down."

Not everyone agrees with the change. While some Roman Catholic groups are still participating, others have pulled out, organizer Timothy Duross says. □

Alabama:

King march re-enactment arrives at state Capitol

MONTGOMERY, Alabama (AP) — A group retracing the steps of civil rights leader Martin Luther King's 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march arrived Friday at the Alabama Capitol, calling for an end to new ballot restrictions enacted in the 50 years since the landmark Voting Rights Act. Martin Luther King III stood near the place his famous father addressed marchers in 1965, saying the work is not yet complete and criticizing practices— including voter identification and reduced polling hours — that he said make it harder for people to cast ballots. "We go all over the world

promoting democracy, but right at home, it seems like we are suppressing democracy," King said. The re-enactment march was organized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, first led by Martin Luther King. It called for a restoration of the Voting Rights Act requirement that states with histories of minority-voter suppression get federal permission before changing voting laws. The U.S. Supreme Court in 2013 struck down the formula that determined which states were covered, saying it was outdated. Marchers left Selma on

Monday after the nation marked the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the March 7, 1965 melee during which demonstrators were beaten by police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Weeks after the confrontation, Martin Luther King, Jr. led the march from Selma to Montgomery, arriving on March 25, 1965. President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law later that year. King paid tribute to the leaders of the civil rights, some famous and some not, but said the responsibility was on everyone to continue the work. Segregationist Gov.

George Wallace in 1965 watched marchers from a window in the Alabama Capitol. On Friday, Gov. Robert Bentley shook King's hand and welcomed the group to Montgomery. However, some people greeted the Republican governor with chants demanding more health care support. Bentley has so far declined to expand coverage under Obamacare. About 100 people made the 54-mile (87-kilometer) trek along U.S. Highway 80 to Montgomery. A few were in their 60s and 70s and had marched in 1965. Others were born decades after that.



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Fixes Come Slowly to 'Corrosive Culture' at VA Hospitals

Continued from Front

He said in an interview on Thursday that in some cases the hospital was hiding delays by persuading veterans to take appointments months in the future, then entering the dates as the veterans' preference so the appointments did not count in calculations of wait times.

He added, "We still have delays being caused by staffing problems that they are trying to cover up." The continued problems at the hospitals underscore the grim reality that overhauling a federal department with almost 300,000 employees scattered across the country is a difficult and tedious process. That truth will almost certainly ensure that Obama fails to make good on his 2008 campaign promise to fix the "broken bureaucracy of the VA" before he leaves office.

But administration officials insist that the situation is getting better, if slowly. In a highly stage-managed appearance at the Phoenix hospital Friday, Obama acknowledged the need for more improvement, even as he insisted that significant progress is being made by Robert A. McDonald, the department's new secretary.

Obama held a private discussion with the hospital's managers, elected officials and staff and closed-door visits with some patients. He said he expected the pace of progress to steadily increase and vowed to

hold McDonald accountable for delivering high-quality care to returning members of the nation's military and their families. Republicans who attended the session with the president on Friday, including

Gamble, to turn around the troubled department. The new secretary vowed to act "aggressively" in holding people accountable, but since taking control he has fired fewer employees than his prede-

cessor did in the year before he resigned. The VA was forced to backtrack in February after McDonald claimed on "Meet the Press" that 60 employees had been fired for manipulating wait times. A spokesman later said it was fewer than 20.



President Barack Obama with Cory Remsburg, who suffered injuries from an improvised explosive device while a U.S. Army soldier in Afghanistan, in Phoenix, March 13, 2015. Obama on Friday made his first visit to the department of Veterans Affairs' hospital in Phoenix since reports surfaced that officials there oversaw sham patient waiting lists used to hide long delays in appointments.

(Doug Mills/The New York Times)

Obama's one-time presidential rival, Sen. John McCain of Arizona, are dismissive of the president's claims. They say reforms in the enormous veterans health care system have been sluggish, and many of the leaders who presided over the scandal are still in place.

After firing Eric K. Shinseki, his first VA secretary, Obama selected McDonald, the former president and chief executive of Procter &

cessor did in the year before he resigned. The VA was forced to backtrack in February after McDonald claimed on "Meet the Press" that 60 employees had been fired for manipulating wait times. A spokesman later said it was fewer than 20.

The director of the Phoenix hospital, Sharon Helman, was fired in December for accepting improper gifts, not for her role in the scandal. Lance Robinson, the

ment spokesman. Another spokeswoman said the investigation of them was continuing.

Dr. Darren Deering, the hospital chief of staff who told a Senate committee in September that there were no manipulated wait times, remains in his job.

Officials said that 1,100 employees across the department were terminated in 2014, but that those terminations were not directly related to actions taken as

a result of the scandal.

"Not a single VA senior executive has been fired for wait-time manipulation," Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said in a statement this week ahead of the president's visit to Phoenix.

"What's more, efforts to hold employees accountable in Phoenix have been repeatedly botched."

Administration officials said this week that the overhaul Obama ordered last summer had begun to show results.

The addition of night and weekend appointments at the system's hospitals have allowed doctors to schedule an additional 880,000 patient visits, and total visits for the last seven months of 2014 are up by 1.8 million appointments over the same period a year earlier, officials said.

The hospital system has added 800 new physicians and 1,800 new nurses and 1,300 medical support technicians, helping to reduce delays.

Brandon Coleman, an addiction counselor at the Phoenix hospital who filed a whistle-blower complaint in January saying the hospital was turning away suicidal veterans, says the department does not have the resources to care for troubled veterans.

"There are a lot of good people doing good work here," he said in an interview Thursday.

"But there are a lot of systematic issues that still need to be fixed. Our office is swamped." □



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Criticism builds on US Republican letter to Iran

C. BABINGTON
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Criticism of 47 Republican senators' letter to Iranian leaders escalated Friday, and one of the lawmakers expressed misgivings about writing directly to an adversary to raise doubts about President Barack Obama's nuclear negotiations. Several newspapers that had endorsed the senators' elections were harshly critical. A handful of conservative commentators and former Republicans aides joined legions of liberals in

calling the letter ill-advised. Republican Sen. Ron Johnson, who may face a tough re-election next year, defended the letter, but added, "If there was any regret, tactically, it probably would have been better just to have it be an open letter addressed to no one." Another signer, Sen. Pat Roberts, expressed similar thoughts. The letter "could have been addressed to other folks and gotten the message out," Roberts said. "But I think the message is more important than who we send it to."

All but seven of the Senate's Republicans signed the letter, but no Democrats did. The letter warns Iran's leaders that any negotiated agreement on their nuclear program could expire when Obama leaves office. Democrats and some academics say the letter undermines Obama's — and future presidents' — ability to set foreign policy. Republicans defended the letter, saying they must take dramatic steps to demand a voice in negotiations, because they fear Obama will be too



Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis. walks on Capitol Hill in Washington. Criticism of 47 Republican senators' letter to Iranian leaders escalated March 13 2015, and one of the lawmakers expressed misgivings about writing directly to an adversary to raise doubts about President Barack Obama's nuclear negotiations. Johnson, who may face a tough re-election next year, defended the letter, but added, "If there was any regret, tactically, it probably would have been better just to have it be an open letter addressed to no one."

(AP Photo/Cliff Owen)

soft on Iran. Some of the 47 senators, however, are taking heat back home from editorial pages that have supported them. In Ohio, the Cleveland Plain Dealer and Cincinnati Enquirer endorsed Sen. Rob Portman's 2010 campaign, but they berated him this week for signing the Iran letter. "The magnitude of this disgraceful decision," a Plain Dealer editorial said, "shows the degree to which partisanship has gobbled up rationality on foreign policy." The Cincinnati Enquirer's editorial said the letter "diminishes the dignity of the Senate by disparaging the president and presenting an amateur lesson on U.S. governance." It praised Portman in general, but said he erred because

"now, facing re-election, he's nervous." Portman, appearing in Columbus Friday, said the letter will strengthen Obama's hand in negotiations with Iran. But former Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland, a Democrat hoping to unseat Portman next year, called the letter "disgraceful" in a fundraising letter. In New Hampshire, The Telegraph of Nashua — which endorsed Sen. Kelly Ayotte in 2010 — chastised her for signing the letter. "One wonders how loud and angry the Republican response would have been if a petty clan of Democratic senators had written an open letter to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev" during nuclear arms talks with Washington, the Telegraph editorial said. □

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Lawyer says goal is to protect rights of fraternity members



Attorney Stephen Jones, left, talks with reporters following a news conference in Oklahoma City, Friday, March, 13 2015. Jones confirmed Friday he was hired to ensure that the due process rights of members of Oklahoma University's Sigma Alpha Epsilon chapter are protected from actions by the university and national chapter, after videos surfaced of fraternity members singing a racist chant aboard a bus on Saturday.

(AP Photo/The Oklahoman, Steve Gooch)

SEAN MURPHY
Associated Press
OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) —

The actions of some fraternity members at the University of Oklahoma caught engaging in a racist chant are inexcusable, but student members still have

rights that must be protected amid concerns for their safety, a lawyer said Friday. Stephen Jones, who was retained by the fraternity's local chapter, said members of Sigma Alpha Epsilon and their parents are concerned about the students' safety after some received death threats and were physically and verbally assaulted.

Jones, who gained national prominence as the attorney for convicted Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, said he has not been retained to initiate any litigation, but to ensure that the due process rights of members are protected from actions by the university and national chapter. He said there also are some legal questions about the fraternity house that university President David Boren ordered closed after the release of the video, which showed some members engaging in a racist chant that referenced lynching and said African-Americans would

never be allowed to become members.

He said the bus on which the students were caught making the chant was one of five charter buses that were taking members to a Founder's Day party at a country club in Oklahoma City on Saturday.

"We're talking about one incident with nine seconds of video, on one of five buses," Jones said.

Jones said he does not represent two fraternity members who Boren ordered expelled on Tuesday for creating a hostile learning environment after they were identified as leading the chant, but Jones said both young men withdrew from the university on Monday before they were expelled.

A spokeswoman for OU would not confirm that, citing student privacy laws.

A spokesman for the fraternity's national headquarters said Friday that officials with the Oklahoma chapter have stopped communicating with them. □

Adult trial for girls in Slender Man stabbing

TODD RICHMOND
Associated Press
WAUKESHA, Wisconsin (AP) —

Two young girls accused of stabbing their classmate to please the horror character Slender Man must stand trial as adults for attempted homicide, a judge ruled Friday.

Both girls face a count of being a party to attempted first-degree intentional homicide with a dangerous weapon enhancer, which automatically places them in adult court under Wisconsin law. They each could face up to 65 years in the state prison system

if convicted. Both defendants and the victim, Payton Leutner, were 12 at the time of the incident.

"Probable cause exists that (the defendants) both attempted to kill P.L. with a dangerous weapon," Judge Michael Bohren said. Both girls' attorneys have argued that the girls legitimately believed they had to kill Leutner to protect their families from Slender Man's wrath. Anthony Cotton, an attorney for one of the girls, called his client a schizophrenic in court Friday. The defense teams asked Bohren to dis-

miss the charges during a hearing last month. They contended second-degree attempted intentional homicide would be a more fitting charge because the girls, as misguided as they were, thought they were defending themselves and their loved ones from Slender Man by attacking Leutner.

Second-degree attempted intentional homicide is a lesser crime that prosecutors would have to pursue in juvenile court. The girls could be held in the juvenile system only until they turn 25. □

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American Politics:

In New Hampshire, Clinton Backers Buckle Up

PATRICK HEALY

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PORTSMOUTH, N.H. - If Hillary Rodham Clinton is dying to roll her eyes at all the questions about her private email server, she has a soul mate in Laura Donohoe, who did just that, in utter disgust, as she defended Clinton on Thursday between spoonfuls of clam chowder.

"Oh God, here we go again - let's jump into the garbage pit and make

Here at Café Espresso, the diner where Clinton's eyes welled up with tears the day before the 2008 primary - a heavily televised scene at a pivotal campaign moment - Donohoe and other women said they were buckling up for a bumpy ride with Clinton into 2016 but certainly not backing away.

Female voters made the difference in Clinton's come-from-behind victory in New Hampshire, many

leader, she'd be the first woman president," said Tobey Harman, a retired teacher. "The email thing, it's a Washington and New York thing, meaningless to regular people."

The controversy dogging Clinton - that she used a personal account for government business, and chose what emails to delete or turn over to the State Department - is too recent to show up in the latest New Hampshire polls.

voters, including some women, if Clinton comes to be seen as unduly secretive or imperious in the months ahead. "The Clintons have drawn sympathy and loyalty from New Hampshire voters in the past, but I don't think women, or men, will look sympathetically on her if they see her as having a problem with secrecy and management," said Andrew Smith, a political scientist and director of the Survey Center at the University of New Hampshire. "This is a legal process issue, not a personality attack on her that you can easily finesse."

But Democrats and others here have a way of rallying to the Clintons in times of crisis.

At a low point in Bill Clinton's 1992 run, voters responded enthusiastically to an appeal he made in Dover just before the primary: "I'll never forget who gave me a second chance, and I'll be there for you until the last dog dies." And in January 2008, Hillary Clinton came to Café Espresso to face a group of undecided voters on a day when her own campaign's polls predicted that she would lose the primary. After one woman asked how she was holding up, Clinton began to reply in a low, halting voice, far different from the confident energy that typically infused her public remarks. "It's not easy, it's not easy," Clinton said. "I couldn't do it if I did not passionately believe it was the right thing to do."

A moment later, her eyes watery, her voice shaking, she added: "This is very personal for me - it's not just political, it's not just public. I see what's happening." She did not cry, but she

was plainly vulnerable and hurting. The moment dominated news coverage here and, according to some voters, prompted them to cast ballots for Clinton.

"They see this woman as someone who can stand up for people, and against attacks, just like her husband did," said Terry Shumaker, a supporter of Hillary Clinton's and a chairman of Bill Clinton's two presidential campaigns in New Hampshire.

"I have not had one person ask me about Secretary Clinton's emails - no 'Hey Terry, what's up with the email?' Not one person." Unlike seven years ago, though, Clinton's mission in New Hampshire is not only about firing up primary voters; it is about winning over independent or "undeclared" voters and Republicans in a general election. And plenty of those voters remain skeptical.

"I was at the gym watching Hillary talk about her email, and it sounded like typical politician spin," said Ashley Caldwell, a 19-year-old hostess at the diner and an undeclared voter.

Donohoe and her husband, Ronan, who voted for Obama in the 2008 primary, said they believed that Clinton's preparedness to take on economic issues and foreign policy challenges would matter to voters in either party more than how she dealt with her email. But she noted that Clinton's long career has regularly been turned against her. "When Hillary's good, people say it's because she has 25 years of experience, and when she missteps, people say it's because she hasn't learned lessons after 25 years of experience," Donohoe said. "It's maddening." □



Laura Donohoe, a retired nurse and her husband Ronan, a retired teacher, have lunch at Café Espresso in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, March 12, 2015. At Café Espresso, the diner where Hillary Rodham Clinton's eyes welled up with tears the day before the 2008 primary, Donohoe and other women said they were buckling up for a bumpy ride with Clinton into 2016, but certainly not backing away.

(Ian Thomas Jansen-Lonnquist/The New York Times)

Hillary the butt of everyone's hatred, because Hillary must be the very worst person on the planet," said Donohoe, a retired nurse. She said she voted for Barack Obama over Clinton in the 2008 New Hampshire primary but plans to support Clinton next year to reward perseverance, if nothing else: "This woman, she's a survivor."


of them breaking for her at the last minute. Their enthusiasm and money, as well as their votes, would be crucial if Clinton comes to have a chance to keep this swing state in the Democratic column, especially if Republicans recaptured states that Obama carried like Florida and Colorado. "What's not to like? She's pro-Israel, she's a strong

Those show Clinton as a runaway front-runner in the New Hampshire Democratic primary; she also leads Jeb Bush and Rand Paul by roughly 10 percentage points each in hypothetical general-election matchups in the most recent WMUR Granite State Poll.

But analysts and pollsters said the imbroglio could grow into a problem with

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Contract worker or employee? Tax liability rests on difference

ANN CARRNS

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Tax time can be particularly taxing for families who pay an in-home caregiver or housekeeper. If the worker is considered an employee - rather than an independent contractor - you, as the employer, are responsible for paying payroll taxes and reporting the details to the Internal Revenue Service. They're often called "nanny taxes" but they can apply to other workers, like caregivers for elderly people, too. How can you tell if a worker is your employee? Some people focus, incorrectly, on the worker's title, or whether they are full time or part time, said Laura Weiland, president of Nanny Tax Co., in Park Ridge, Illinois: "In their heads, they say, 'I just have a babysitter; she's not a nanny.'" But the IRS looks at other criteria, like how much you paid the worker, and how much say you have over how he or she does the job. If you regularly direct details of the worker's activities and set the hours, the IRS generally considers the person to be your employee, although other factors may come into play. If they use their own tools, and also work for others - like, a landscaper who uses his own equipment to mow lawns - they're typically considered self-employed. "If you control the work - what's done, when it's done - they're probably an employee," said Gregg Wind, a certified public accountant in Los Angeles. The IRS also considers what you paid the worker. For tax year 2014, the cutoff is \$1,900 for the year, or \$1,000 in a quarter. "Once you cross that threshold, the IRS considers you an em-

ployer," said Kerri Swope, senior director of Care.com HomePay, which provides payroll and tax services for household employers. That means you're required to pay federal payroll taxes, including Social Security and Medicare taxes, and provide the worker with a W-2 form. Social Security and Medicare taxes total 7.65 percent each for the employer and employee, or a total of 15.3 percent of wages; you can either withhold the employee's share and remit it to the IRS, or pay it yourself. (You'll also most likely have to pay federal and state unemployment taxes, which fund benefits for workers who lose their jobs.) Swope notes that the IRS and the Labor Department are paying closer attention to misclassification of employees as independent contractors. The Labor Department recently gave grants to 19 states to help them in their efforts; a list of the states receiving grants is available on the department's website. At least household employers don't have to worry about paying taxes on the cost of providing a mobile phone to a babysitter or caregiver, Swope said, since the IRS recently clarified that cellphone service for a caregiver is necessary in case of an emergency. Care.com HomePay estimates that saves the average family \$200 a year. She noted that household employers may want to take note of IRS changes that may affect their expenses this year. For instance, if you reimburse your caregiver for using a personal car to run errands, the IRS increased the mileage reimbursement rate to 57.5 cents in 2015, up from 56 cents in 2014. □



Trader Richard Deviccario works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Friday, March 13, 2015.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew)

US Financial Front: Wall Street bonuses vs. total earnings of full-time minimum wage workers

JUSTIN WOLFERS

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The Wall Street bonus pool for last year is roughly double the total earnings of all Americans who work full time at the federal minimum wage. That claim, which comes from a new report from Sarah Anderson of the Institute for Policy Studies, is one of the more striking sound bites I have heard in quite some time. And so I thought it worth digging in to the data to see if it checks out. Short answer: It does, although given the uncertainty in these sorts of calculations, the precise ratio could easily be a bit higher or lower. Let's start with the Wall Street bonuses. The New York state comptroller reported Wednesday that the size of the bonus pool paid to securities industries employees in New York City

was \$28.5 billion. Dividing this total among 167,800 workers yields an average bonus of \$172,860, which seems plausible enough. For sure, some received much, much bigger bonuses, and many received nothing. What about the total earnings of full-time workers at the federal minimum wage? The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that there are 1.03 million full-time workers paid an hourly wage of \$7.25 or less. These people tend to work around 40 hours a week on average. If they all earn \$7.25 per hour and work 50 weeks per year, the total earnings of this group comes to nearly \$15 billion. Anderson, whose report usefully shows all her work, prefers an estimate of 37 hours per week - which looks too low to me based on other data - and 52 weeks per year, so after

rounding, she gets to a total of \$14 billion. Rather than quibble over which number is correct, it makes more sense to highlight the more important uncertainties surrounding any estimate. The count of workers at federal minimum wage includes only those who are paid hourly, and so omits those paid weekly or monthly. On the flip side, the BLS count is based on income before tips and commissions, and so may overstate the number of people with low hourly earnings. And while my calculation assumed that all minimum wage workers earn \$7.25 per hour, in fact many earn less than this, including wait staff and others who rely on tips, some students and young workers, certain farmworkers, and those whose bosses simply flout the minimum wage law. □

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Iraq militia leader hails Iran's 'unconditional' support

**QASSIM ZAHRA
SAMEER N. YACOB**
Associated Press

TIKRIT, Iraq (AP) — The U.S. has failed to live up to its promises to help Iraq fight Islamic State extremists, unlike the "unconditional" assistance being given by Iran, the commander of Iraq's powerful Shiite militias alleged Friday. In a battlefield interview near Tikrit, where Iraqi forces are fighting to retake Saddam Hussein's hometown from the militants of the so-called Islamic State, commander Hadi al-Amiri criticized those who "kiss the hands of the Americans and get nothing in return."

Iraqi forces entered Tikrit for the first time Wednesday from the north and south. On Friday, they waged

fierce battles to secure the northern neighborhood of Qadisiyya and lobbed mortar shells and rockets into the city center, still in the hands of IS militants. Iraqi military officials have said they expect to reach central Tikrit in two to three days.

The Iranian-backed Shiite militias have played a crucial role in regaining territory from the Sunni extremists of the Islamic State group, supporting Iraq's embattled military and police forces.

An Iraqi government official told The Associated Press that Iran has sold Baghdad nearly \$10 billion in arms and hardware, mostly weapons for urban warfare like assault rifles, heavy machine-guns and rocket launchers. The of-



Hadi al-Amiri commander, center, of Iraq's powerful Shiite militias speaks during an interview with The Associated Press on the battlefield near the Iraqi city of Tikrit, 80 miles north of Baghdad, Iraq, Friday, March 13, 2015. Al-Amiri accused the U.S. of falling short on promises to help Iraq in its battle against the Islamic State group and called Iranian assistance to Iraqi security forces "unconditional."
(AP Photo/Khalid Mohammed)

ficial spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media.

In November, President Barack Obama authorized the deployment of up to 1,500 more U.S. troops to bolster Iraqi forces, which could more than double the total of American forces in Iraq to 3,100. The Pentagon has made a spending request to Congress of \$1.6 billion, focusing on training and arming Kurdish and Iraqi forces. According to a Pentagon document prepared in November, the U.S. is looking to provide an estimated \$89.3 million in weapons and equipment to each of the nine Iraqi brigades.

The U.S.-led coalition of eight countries has launched more than 2,000 airstrikes in Iraq alone since August 2014, and the U.S. is also hitting the militant group from the air in Syria. Iraqi and U.S. officials have acknowledged the role airstrikes have played in roll-

ing back the militants, saying the air campaign was an essential component in victories at the Mosul Dam, in Amiri, and more recently, in the crucial oil refining town of Beiji.

But the U.S. is not taking part in the operation in Tikrit, with U.S. officials saying they were not asked by Iraq to participate.

Al-Amiri, the Shiite militia commander who also is head of the Badr Organization political party, said that "help from Iran is unconditional."

He warned that Iraq should not sacrifice its sovereignty for the sake of receiving weapons and assistance from the U.S., suggesting the Iraqi government is taking instructions from Washington.

"Our sovereignty is more important than U.S. weapons," he said. "We can bring weapons from any country in the world."

Separately, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's top Shiite cleric, urged the

government to step up its support for the Shiite militias and to take care of the families of militiamen killed in battle. His remarks were relayed by his spokesman Ahmed al-Safi in the Shiite holy city of Karbala.

As many as 30,000 men are fighting the extremists in Tikrit — most of them volunteers with various Shiite militias, Iraqi officials say. U.S. Gen. Martin Dempsey said Wednesday that up to 20,000 militiamen may be involved.

Karim al-Nouri, a spokesman for the Popular Mobilization Forces, the official name of the Shiite militias, said as many as 40 Iranian advisers are also taking part. In its march across Syria and northern and western Iraq, the Islamic State group — also known as ISIS or ISIL — has seized cities, towns and vast tracts of land. Its predominantly Sunni fighters view Shiites as apostates and have carried out a number of massacres. □



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Egypt rakes billions in Gulf aid, boosting its president

SARAH EL DEEB
BRIAN ROHAN
Associated Press

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt (AP) — Egypt raked in promises of more than \$12 billion in investment and aid from its Gulf Arab allies on Friday, kicking off an international conference aimed at rescuing the country's gutted economy and giving a political boost to its soldier-turned-president.

The three-day gathering in the Sinai resort of Sharm el-Sheikh is meant to show the world Egypt is open for business again to draw investors after four years of instability and turmoil that followed the 2011 Arab Spring uprising that ousted longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi made his case for the world's support, depicting Egypt as vital to regional stability and a bulwark against Islamic militancy.

"Egypt has and will always be the first line of defense against the dangers faced by the region," el-Sissi, wearing a dark suit and a purple tie, said to one of many rounds of applause that interrupted his 26-minute address. Some 1,500 delegates from more than 50 nations were in attendance.

The gathering of royals, heads of state, top international officials and businessmen was also an opportunity for el-Sissi to put behind him criticism over the military's 2013 ouster of Egypt's elected president, Islamist Mohammed Morsi.

Since the ouster — which was led by el-Sissi, then head of the military — the government has cracked down hard on Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists, with hundreds killed and thousands imprisoned. It has also targeted secular and liberal activists. At the same time, Egyptian security forces have been battling a growing Islamic militant insurgency, mainly centered in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, addressing the conference, made a strong show of support for Egypt, with only a glancing reference to rights concerns and a call for more transparency.

"This part of the world is blessed with a stunning amount of commercial potential," Kerry said at an American Chamber of Commerce event prior to the opening of the conference.

The U.S., however, still cannot restore hundreds of millions of dollars in suspended military aid to Egypt, as el-Sissi has sought, because the Obama administration is undecided about whether to affirm Egypt's progress on democracy and human rights or issue a national security waiver. It must do one or other under the 2015 federal budget to unblock the aid.

El-Sissi outlined to delegates his economic recovery plan, saying he wanted to see at least six percent annual GDP growth within the next five years, up from around 2 percent currently, and reduce unemployment from its current 13 percent to about 10 percent. He also promised fair taxation and lower inflation. □

Video seems to show three UK girls before they went to Syria

SUZAN FRASER
DESMOND BUTLER
Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — A video that appears to show a man helping three British schoolgirls on their way to join the Islamic State group in Syria was released Friday by a Turkish news channel. A Haber television said that

video came from the police but didn't elaborate on the content.

Turkish authorities said the man was working for the intelligence service of a country that is part of the anti-IS coalition, but did not publicly name the country. On Friday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu

16, and Amira Abase, 15 — traveled from the U.K. to Turkey last month, from where they are believed to have crossed into Syria. Their journey highlighted the difficulty of halting the radicalization of young Muslims.

There has been tension between Turkey and Britain over who was to blame for the teenagers being able to sneak into Syria to join the extremist group, with Turkey accusing Britain of failing to notify authorities in time to prevent them from crossing the border. The girls had boarded a flight for Istanbul on Feb. 17. Earlier this month, a Turkish television station obtained video showing the teenagers at an Istanbul bus terminal before they boarded a bus to a city near Turkey's border with Syria.

Cavusoglu also said that Turkey has detained 16 Indonesians trying to cross the border into Syria to join the IS group and was looking for another group of the same size reported missing in Turkey. Turkish news reports say 11 children were among the 16 Indonesians who were caught. □



In this image taken from video released on Friday, March 13, 2015, a girl believed to be one of three British girls on their way to join the Islamic State Group in Syria, is seen in Turkey.

(AP Photo/A Haber via APTN)

the video was filmed in Gaziantep on Turkey's border with Syria by the man, who was later detained by Turkish authorities.

A Turkish government official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment, confirmed the

said the man was a Syrian citizen.

In the video, a man speaking in English appears to tell the British girls that they will be in Syria within an hour. The three girls — identified by British authorities as Shamima Begum, 15, Kadiza Sultana,

2 charged over links to Paris gunman

LORI HINNANT
Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Two men with ties to one of the three gunmen who terrorized Paris were handed preliminary charges Friday, the Paris prosecutor said, describing hundreds of texts, regular meetings and DNA recovered from a stun gun among the belongings at a bloodied kosher supermarket.

The two men, identified as Amar R. and Said M., were

given preliminary charges for participation in a terrorist group with the intent to commit crime.

Prosecutors said Amar R., a jailhouse acquaintance of Paris terrorist Amedy Coulibaly, had exchanged more than 600 texts with Coulibaly from September to January and met him on Jan. 5 and Jan. 6. That was just a day before two brothers killed 12 people at the Charlie Hebdo satirical newspaper in Paris on Jan.

7 and before Coulibaly shot dead a policewoman on Jan. 8 and killed four of his hostages on Jan. 9 at a Paris kosher grocery store. DNA from Said M. was recovered from a stun gun in Coulibaly's belongings at the market, the prosecutor said. Said M. and Amar R. contacted each other more than 1,200 times between February 2014 and January 2015 and saw each other regularly, the prosecutor said. □



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Venezuelan arrested during protests dies in police custody



Josefa Alvarez de Gonzalez, center, is comforted by relatives of her husband, Rodolfo Gonzalez, outside the morgue office in Caracas, Venezuela, Friday, March 13, 2015. Rodolfo Gonzalez who was arrested last year during demonstrations against the Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro government has died in state custody. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

FABIOLA SANCHEZ
Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)
— A Venezuelan man who

was arrested last year during demonstrations against the country's socialist government has died in state

custody, his family said on Friday.

The family of Rodolfo Gonzalez said that he died while being held at the headquarters of Venezuela's intelligence police. The 64-year-old pilot had been jailed since April 2014 and was awaiting trial on charges related to promoting violence during the protests.

His daughter Lissette Gonzalez announced his death on Twitter, without indicating how he had died. She said the family last spoke with him Thursday night, and understood that he was to be transferred to another facility in the morning.

The government has appointed a prosecutor to investigate the cause of death.

The protest movement raged through the South American country for several weeks last year. Dozens were killed in the unrest. Several government opponents remain jailed, including Leopoldo Lopez, a former Caracas-area

mayor.

This year, street protests reignited in the western part of the South American country, with demonstrators protesting the same issues of rising crime, worsening inflation, and chronic shortages. □

Ask Hamas Twitter campaign backfires

IAN DEITCH

JERUSALEM (AP) — A Twitter hashtag campaign launched by Hamas on Friday to build support in the West seems to be backfiring with users mocking the Islamic militant group that rules Gaza.

Hamas launched (hashtag)AskHamas on Friday. The campaign promised responses from the group's leaders, or as they called it, "Truth from the mouth of the horse."

Some Twitter users swiftly responded with mockery. One asked if a masked Hamas gunman was "single and ready to mingle." Some criticized Hamas for hiding weapons and fighters in civilian areas in its war last summer with Israel. One asked Hamas "how it chooses human shields."

The Gaza war left more than 2,100 Palestinians dead, the majority of them civilians, according to Palestinian and U.N. officials. Israel says the number of Palestinian fighters killed was much higher and accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields and storing weapons in schools and hiding gunmen in hospitals. On the Israeli side, 66 soldiers and six civilians were killed.

A Twitter user whose profile identified her as an Israeli diplomat asked: "Given a choice, is it better to hide a weapons cache in a hospital's radiology or pediatrics unit?"

Another Tweeter asked:

"Now serious question - looking back to summer 2014--was it worth it?"

Hamas said the hashtag campaign was launched so the militant group could express its views directly to the world. Bassem Naim, a Hamas official, said the campaign is "a step by Hamas to introduce it to the world in new languages, English, French and German, on the basis that the source is a direct Hamas official, not through mediators or translators."

According to the social media analytics website Topsy, the AskHamas hashtag generated 36,000 tweets in a single day. Some tweeters asked Hamas about their use of suicide bombers in buses, cafes and other civilian areas during the Palestinian Intifada.

Journalist Jeffery Goldberg asked "Why did you murder 30 civilians, including 20 people over the age of 70, at a Passover Seder in Netanyahu in 2002?"

Pictures of Palestinian children at rallies where militants wore suicide bomber vests and waved guns were posted.

Some users made a point of mentioning how senior Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal spent the recent Gaza war in his hotel room in Doha. One wrote: "Are your brave billionaire 'leaders' still urging you and your children to martyrdom from the luxury of a 5-star hotel in Qatar?" □

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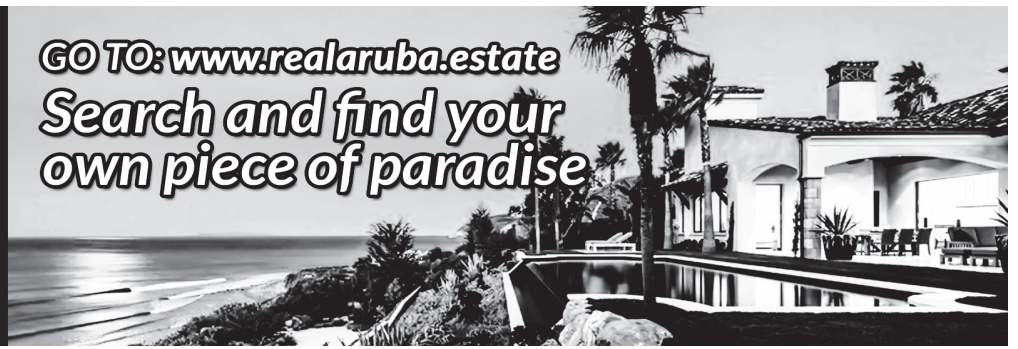
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The yogurt files: French dairy bosses caught colluding

ANGELA CHARLTON
Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Frantic text messages between French CEOs about cottage cheese prices. Clandestine smoke breaks in a Left Bank apartment to collude on yogurt strategy.

A ruling this week by France's competition authority makes for rich reading, detailing a web of secret meetings, handwritten charts and phone exchanges over six years to fix prices on many of the yogurt-related goods on French supermarket shelves.

Eleven companies were hit with 192 million euros (\$203 million) in fines for the cartel, including Yoplait and Lactalis and makers of most of the store-brand yogurt sold around France. Lactalis did not contest the accusations, but said it would appeal the decision, arguing in a statement that the fines "overestimate in an obvious way the gravity of the facts, and

their impact on the economy." The company said it is committed to obeying the law. The cartel was uncovered thanks to a special procedure that allows companies to report their own price-fixing activity to regulators in exchange for reduced punishment. Yoplait, majority owned by U.S.-based General Mills Inc., was the first company to report the activity, and was given no fines.

Company bosses sketched out secret deals in hotel rooms and on special phone lines created to avoid detection. Sometimes they'd meet at Le Chien Qui Fume, an iconic Paris cafe, one boss is quoted in the investigation documents as saying. His counterparts then "came to my apartment a few times to continue the conversation and smoke a cigarette," he added.

A Yoplait executive used a special cell phone dedicated to the cartel, paid for by Yoplait but not of-



A woman walks next to a yoghurt refrigerator in a supermarket in Paris, Thursday, March 12, 2015. France's competition authority handed the country's top yogurt makers \$203 million in fines Thursday for fixing prices over the course of several years, striking secret deals in hotel rooms and on special phone lines created to avoid detection.

(AP Photo/Michel Euler)

ficially linked to him in any way. An executive with dairy maker Senagral used a special cell phone taken out in his girlfriend's name. Senagral, which specializes in store-brand dairy prod-

ucts, received the biggest fine, 46 million euros. The regulator said had 316 million euros in sales of price-fixed yogurts in 2011, more than any of the other companies.

The ruling describes how the companies were facing rising milk and packaging costs, and hints at some desperation. One executive lamented in a text message a "totally crazy price" at one supermarket, saying he needed a higher price or else "I'll sink!!!"

Another text message protested a low price seen on a supermarket advertisement: "vanilla-flavored cottage cheese 8 x 100 grams at 1.19 euros?! Big problem for announcing rises!"

Amal Taleb, lawyer for consumer group UFC Que Choisir, hailed the investigation but said it's too bad that French consumers, who are big buyers of yogurt, won't benefit. The fines go to the public treasury. □

Cuba seeks long prison terms in trial over egg corruption

HAVANA (AP) — Cuban prosecutors are seeking prison terms of eight to 20 years for nearly two dozen people suspected of conspiring to steal millions of eggs for sale on the black market, official media reported Friday.

Communist Party newspaper Granma said the 19 suspects are accused of food theft, generating fraudulent receipts and other crimes. They include several executives of the state-run egg distribution company in Havana as well as accountants, drivers and other workers. The article, which took up a page and a half in Friday's edition, said more than 8 million eggs were di-

verted to the black market between January and October 2012. It added that the company's economic loss was an estimated \$356,000. "It is certain that the sentences, although severe, do not solve the problem on their own," the paper said. "On occasions it is necessary for evildoers to feel the full weight of the law, in addition to shame in front of family and society." President Raul Castro has made a point of cracking down on corruption, which has long flourished in Cuba, with dozens of government officials and foreign businesspeople swept up in high-profile graft cases in recent years. □



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In coalition of many, US air power does the heavy lifting

ADAM SCHRECK

Associated Press

AL-UDEID AIR BASE, Qatar

(AP) — American refueling planes rumble into the air from this desert air base around the clock to top up coalition aircraft bombing Islamic State militants, whether they're Arab fighters flying out of regional bases or French warplanes catapulted off an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf.

The al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar is the regional nerve center for the air war against the militants who have taken over nearly a third of Iraq and Syria. That makes it the main hub for coordinating warplanes from the U.S. and 11 other nations in the coalition carrying out bombing raids.

While the U.S. is doing the heavy lifting in the airstrikes, American officials say the allies' contributions are vital.

"This is dangerous stuff. This is not political theater," said Lt. Col. David Haworth, chief of the current operations division for the Combined Air Operation Center.

"I don't think what we are doing today would be even remotely possible without the coalition partners," he told The Associated Press, making a rare media visit to the base.

"To say that we want to or we are capable of going it alone I think would be a terrible mistake."

The low-rise Combined Air Operation Center, packed with rows of computer terminals with big-screen monitors overhead, brings together officers from across the coalition to help share information and plan missions.

Intelligence gathered by coalition members helps give commanders a deeper understanding of how the Islamic State group operates on the ground, Haworth said. For example, at times its fighters mass together like a traditional army unit, while in other situations they behave more like insurgent guerrillas.

All information will be key in preparations for an eventual offensive by Iraqi troops

and Kurdish fighters to retake the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, the biggest city under the extremists' control. The coalition will no doubt be backing the assault, though officials here would not discuss plans for future operations.

"If they (the militants) want to try and reinforce, whether it's Mosul or some other location, we want to make sure we're ready," Haworth said. "If they want to flee, we'll want to make sure that we have that contingency covered as well."

American planes in general hit more of what the military refers to as "dynamic" targets — ones that are not pre-planned — and a mobile insurgency like the Islamic State group makes for a lot of dynamic targets. The Air Force estimates that half of all strikes in the battle stem from close air support for Iraqi ground forces. Another 30 percent involve hitting Islamic State militants traveling between Iraq and Syria.

Many coalition members, meanwhile, might drop multiple bombs on a single preset target, such as a militant-held compound or

mobile oil refinery.

Since the bombing campaign began, American warplanes have handled 80 percent of the 2,780 airstrikes carried out as of Tuesday in Iraq and Syria, according to the most recent figures provided by the U.S. military.

Primarily Western allies in-

sion in the campaign, it's an American plane. Or by yet another measure, other coalition members have dropped a fifth of the munitions used so far in the campaign.

Part of the reason for the large American role in Syria comes down to the monthslong battle

Jordanian fighter pilot Lt. Muath al-Kaseasbeh went down behind enemy lines in December. He was eventually killed by the militants. The UAE, which boasts one of the region's most capable air forces, resumed airstrikes last month after the U.S. moved search-and-rescue teams closer to



A B-1 bomber deploys a prototype Long Range Anti-Ship Missile. B-1 bombers are flying in and out of the al-Udeid Air Base in Doha, Qatar, the regional nerve center for the air war against the militants who have taken over nearly a third of Iraq and Syria. That makes it the main hub for coordinating warplanes from the U.S. and 11 other nations in the coalition carrying out bombing raids. (DARPA via The New York Times)

cluding Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Jordan and the Netherlands operate over Iraq, and have handled about three of every 10 airstrikes there.

The share of American strikes is even greater in Syria. There, Arab coalition members have conducted just 93 airstrikes, compared with 1,137 by American aircraft. The countries operating alongside the U.S. over Syria include Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

By the military's definition, an airstrike refers to a particular target, regardless of how many planes are involved in hitting it and how much ordnance is fired at it. By another measure — strike sorties — three out of five times that a warplane takes off on a strike mis-

sion in the campaign, it's an American plane. Or by yet another measure, other coalition members have dropped a fifth of the munitions used so far in the campaign. Part of the reason for the large American role in Syria comes down to the monthslong battle

for Kobani, where relentless pounding from the air helped Kurdish fighters finally fend off the Islamic State group's offensive trying to take the town, on the border with Turkey. Longer-range American aircraft like the swept-wing B-1 bombers that operate out of al-Udeid were particularly well suited for that fight. They are able to spend hours over the battlefield loaded with up to 24 tons of bombs that can be used in multiple airstrikes.

"We brought a lot of loiter time, a lot of weapons" over Kobani, said Lt. Col. Joe Kramer, 34th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron commander. The number in Syria was also affected by the Emirates' decision to sit out the fight for several weeks after the battlefield. It and Bahrain have deployed some aircraft to Jordan, bringing them closer to the fight. Arab allies also give the coalition access to much-needed bases dotted around the Gulf. Canadian warplanes operate out of Kuwait, for example, while Australia has deployed F/A-18 fighters to an air base outside Dubai. In addition to Qatar, American planes fly out of bases in the Emirates, Kuwait and Jordan, as well as off the carrier USS Carl Vinson. Al-Udeid also hosts a forward headquarters for U.S. Central Command, which directs military operations throughout the region, including those still ongoing in Afghanistan, as well as Patriot missile batteries to protect regional allies against missile attacks. □



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Iditarod musher Matt Failor massages a sore ankle on one of his dogs in the Ruby, Alaska, checkpoint on Thursday, March 12, 2015.
Associated Press

PETA cites dog cruelty in calling for end of the Iditarod

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — An animal rights group is renewing its call for an end to the world's most famous sled dog race. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals on Friday said in a statement that the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race should be permanently canceled. PETA Senior Vice President Daphna Nachminovitch cites the death Thursday of Wyatt, a 3-year-old male on four-time champion Lance Mackey's team, as the latest casualty in a long list of dogs that have died in the race. It also cited the use of a blind dog on another team. Musher Kelly Maixner tells Anchorage television station KTUU that Laura is a valued team member, but sometimes gets confused. Iditarod's top official, Stan Hooley, declined comment. He says to engage an "opportunistic organization with precisely zero credibility is pointless." □



Awesome Irving

Cavs' Irving scores career-high 57

Cleveland Cavaliers' Kyrie Irving (2) drives around San Antonio Spurs' Tony Parker (9) during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Thursday, March 12, 2015, in San Antonio.
Associated Press
Page 20

Woods to miss Bay Hill

DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

PALM HARBOR, Florida (AP) — Tiger Woods will not be at Bay Hill next week for the Arnold Palmer Invitational, the second tournament he has missed since stating a month ago that he would not return to golf until his game was ready. Woods still wasn't ruling out the Masters in a brief statement Friday on his website.

"I've put in a lot of time and work on my game and I'm making strides," Woods said. "But like I've said, I won't return to the PGA Tour until my game is tournament ready and I can compete at the highest level."

He said he spoke to Palmer on Friday to tell him he would not be at his tournament.

Woods is an eight-time winner at Bay Hill. This will be the second straight time he has missed the Arnold Palmer Invitational. A year ago, he had a back injury that led to surgery a week after the tournament, causing him to miss the Masters for the first time.

"I hope to be ready for the Mas-

ters, and I will continue to work hard preparing for Augusta," Woods said in his statement.

Woods has fallen to No. 79 in the

up to the Masters, he will be out of the top 100 when — or if — he gets to Augusta.

Two tournaments remain before



In this Feb. 5, 2015, file photo, Tiger Woods speaks to reporters after withdrawing during the first round of the Farmers Insurance Open golf tournament in San Diego. **Associated Press**

world, his worst ranking since the week before he won his first PGA Tour event as a 20-year-old in 1996. If he does not play leading

the Masters — the Valero Texas Open and the Shell Houston Open. Woods has not played the Texas Open since 1996. He has never

played the Houston Open, and he has never played the week before the Masters.

The decision ramps up speculation on the state of Woods — his mind and his game — leading to Augusta. He has played only 47 holes this year. Woods missed the cut in the Phoenix Open with a career-high 82 in the second round. A week later, he withdrew after 11 holes at Torrey Pines for tightness in his lower back.

He said on Feb. 11 that his scores were not acceptable and that he would not return until his game was up to his standards.

Since back surgery on March 31 of last year, Woods has completed only two 72-hole events. He finished 69th in the British Open, 23 shots behind Rory McIlroy. And he tied for last in an 18-man field at the Hero World Challenge at Isleworth, a course he has played more than any other.

Most shocking about his debut in 2015 was his short game, a collection of bladed shots and chunks that have led to debate over whether he has the yips. □

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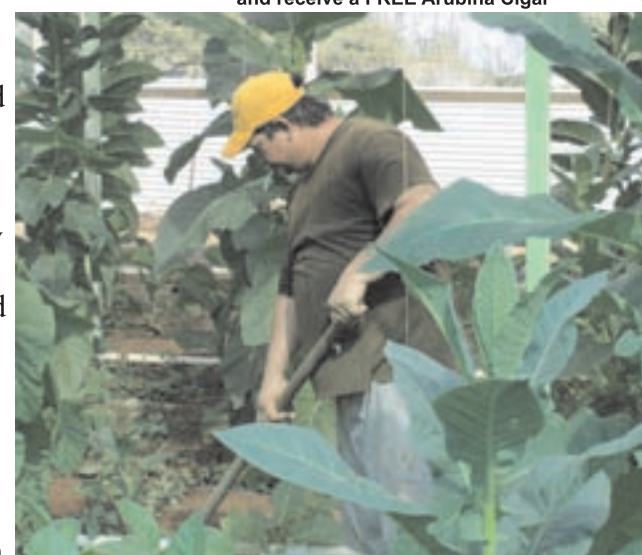
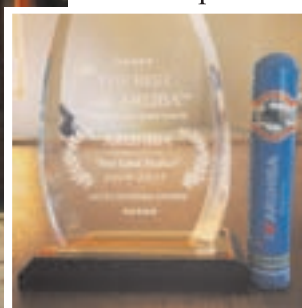


ORANJESTAD- Benjamin Petrocchi, a true native Aruban started the newest export product of Aruba, locally produced hand rolled cigars called "Aruhiba". These cigars are produced and cultivated in Aruba. Petrocchi always had a interest in the cigar business and has also sold Premium Cuban Cigars, and now he is growing his own tobacco crops. After many attempts and trips to Santo Domingo and Cuba, he started his own production and cultivation of Aruhiba Cigars in Aruba. The whole process took him 10 years to perfect. Petrocchi dedication to the cigars is important for the moulding and process of making a perfect cigar which takes a long time. Their handmade cigar box is specially designed with their "Aruhiba" logo. Petrocchi considers

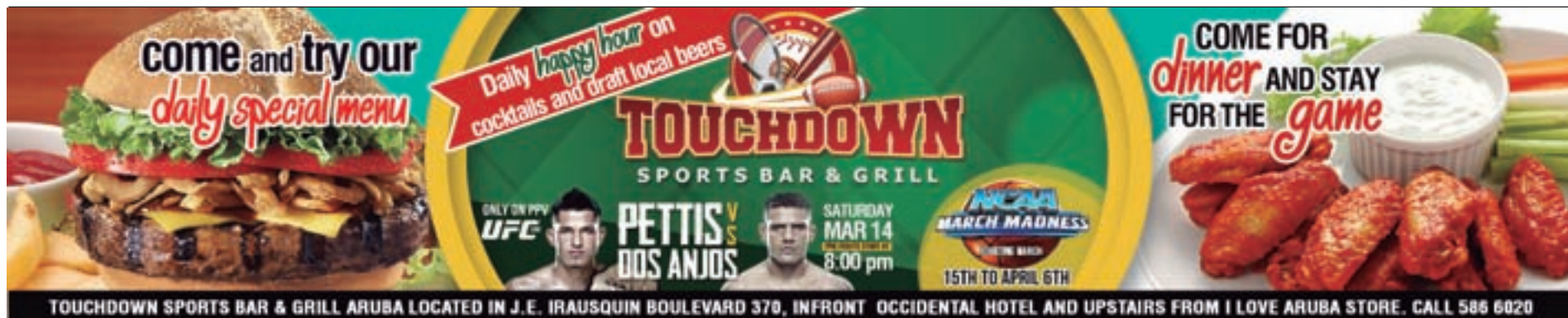
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Owner Benjamin Petrocchi



NHL Capsules

Bruins maintain dominance over Lightning with 3-2 win

The Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand scored shootout goals to lift the Boston Bruins to a 3-2 victory over the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday night.

Boston beat Tampa Bay for the 10th straight time, the longest active slide for a Bruins opponent. Since joining the NHL in 1992, the Lightning have won only five times in 48 games at Boston.

The Lightning have also never beaten the Bruins after regulation in 18 tries, going 0-9-9. Tampa Bay failed to capitalize on a power play in overtime.

Tuukka Rask made 35 saves for Boston, which is 6-0-1 in its last seven games, including four straight wins.

Vladislav Namestnikov tied it 2-2 for Tampa Bay with 11:56 remaining in the third period when he slid the puck through Rask's pads. Ben Bishop made 28 saves for Tampa Bay, which had its four-game winning streak ended. Tyler Johnson, who leads the Lightning with 66 points, extended his career-best point streak to eight games.

SENATORS 5, CANADIENS 2 MONTREAL (AP) — Erik Karlsson scored twice, and goalie Andrew Hammond remained unbeaten in regulation time as Ottawa topped Montreal.

Eric Condra, Mark Stone and Marc Methot also scored for Ottawa, which has won nine of 11 as it chases a playoff spot. Hammond made 27 saves to improve to 8-0-1 during that stretch.

Max Pacioretty scored twice for Montreal, which has only one win in four games. The Canadiens, who have yielded the few-



Chicago Blackhawks' Brad Richards celebrates his tie-breaking goal against the Arizona Coyotes during the third period of an NHL hockey game Thursday, March 12, 2015, in Glendale, Ariz. The Blackhawks defeated the Coyotes 2-1.

Associated Press

est goals in the NHL, allowed five for the first time since Nov. 23.

Montreal outshot Ottawa 29-28, but the Senators improved to 3-1 against the Canadiens this season.

BLUES 1, FLYERS 0, SO

ST. LOUIS (AP) — St. Louis' Brian Elliott and Philadelphia's Steve Mason both earned shutouts, but Elliott picked up the win in a shootout as the host Blues edged the Flyers.

Elliott made 28 saves through overtime, and Mason stopped 35 shots. T.J. Oshie and Vladimir Tarasenko both scored in the shootout for the Blues, and Elliott stopped Jakub Voracek and Wayne Simmonds in the tiebreaker. The Blues have won three straight and five of seven. St. Louis coach Ken Hitchcock, formerly of the Flyers, became the fourth NHL coach to earn 700 regular-season victories.

Elliott recorded his fourth shutout of the season and

29th in the NHL, including 20 with the Blues. That tied the franchise record set by his former teammate Jaroslav Halak.

Mason posted his third shutout this season and 26th in his career for the Flyers, who lost their fourth straight.

PENGUINS 6, OILERS 4

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Steve Downie and Patric Hornqvist scored just over a minute apart late in the third period, and Pittsburgh avoided an embarrassing collapse by beating Edmonton. Downie's 12th goal of the season on a rebound 14:38 into the third gave Pittsburgh the lead after the Penguins let a four-goal lead slip away.

Hornqvist doubled it 1:06 later to help the Penguins win for the seventh time in nine games.

Brandon Sutter scored twice for Pittsburgh. Sidney Crosby added his 23rd goal of the season and finished with three points. Da-

vid Perron netted his 11th since coming to Pittsburgh from Edmonton in January. Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 25 shots.

Anton Lander, Jordan Eberle, Benoit Pouliot and Derek Roy scored for the Oilers. Marc-Andre Fleury made 25 saves for the Penguins, who moved within two points of the second-place New York Islanders in the Metropolitan Division.

BLACKHAWKS 2, COYOTES 1

GLENDALE, Arizona (AP) — Brad Richards scored a tie-breaking power-play goal with 7:11 left in the third period to give Chicago a win against Arizona.

Richards put in a rebound of Kris Versteeg's blocked shot. It was the 900th NHL point for Richards, who entered in ninth place among active players.

The Blackhawks had seven power plays and converted two of them, including Andrew Shaw's first-period goal. Corey Crawford

made 17 saves in the win, and Arizona's Mike Smith stopped 43 shots.

The Coyotes had a power play for the last 38.5 seconds of the game, and made it a 6-on-4 skating advantage after pulling Smith, but couldn't force overtime. Tobias Rieder had given Arizona a 1-0 lead early in the first period. The playoff-bound Blackhawks have earned at least one point in six of their last seven games. Arizona has lost 13 of 14.

KINGS 4, CANUCKS 0

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Jonathan Quick made 19 saves for his fifth shutout of the season, and Los Angeles beat Vancouver.

Justin Williams and Anze Kopitar each had a goal and an assist, and Tyler Tofoli and Marian Gaborik also scored for Los Angeles, which has won four of five and 12 of 16.

The Kings, 3-0 against the Canucks this season with two meetings remaining, jumped over Winnipeg and into the second wild-card playoff spot in the Western Conference.

Eddie Lack made 16 saves for Vancouver, which entered play second in the Pacific Division, one point ahead of Calgary and three ahead of the Kings.

SHARKS 2, PREDATORS 0

SAN JOSE, California (AP) — Antti Niemi made 35 saves to shut out Nashville for the second time this season, and Tomas Hertl scored a power-play goal late in the second period to lead San Jose over the Predators. Niemi followed a 29-save performance in December with another strong game against Nashville to lead the Sharks to their fourth win in five games. □



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Cavs' Irving steps forward in sublime performance vs. Spurs

TOM WITHERS
AP Sports Writer

With the game ball safely tucked under his arm, Kyrie Irving stood under the basket and accepted congratulations from awed teammates following a performance none of them will soon forget.

He slapped some hands, hugged a beaming LeBron James and then handed the ball to the Cavaliers' security director — a turn-over of joy.

This one was a keeper.

It's not every day you score 57 points. It's not every day you bring the defending NBA champions to their knees. It's not every day you upstage the irrepressible James. And, it's not every day you leave former NBA star-turned-television commentator Charles Barkley speechless.

Cleveland's guard did it all Thursday night, scoring a franchise-record 57, zipping around the floor with stunning ease and dropping 3-pointers from every angle as the Cavs beat the San Antonio Spurs 128-125 in overtime.

Irving was spectacular, stunning and simply sublime.

"Kyrie Irving was unstoppable," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said. "I don't know how to guard that. He did a hell of a job. We all know how talented he is, but he really went to a new level tonight."

This wasn't necessarily a breakout for the soon-to-be 23-year-old Irving. More of a validation. Irving has arrived.

After all, he's already been a No. 1 overall NBA draft pick, a three-time NBA All-Star and regarded as one of the league's elite in a stellar class of point guards. He scored 55 in a game against Portland earlier this



Cleveland Cavaliers' Kyrie Irving (2) drives around San Antonio Spurs' Tim Duncan (21) during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Thursday, March 12, 2015, in San Antonio.

Associated Press

year, and Irving has shown a maturity off the floor that has impressed even his toughest critics.

This, though, was something more. This was Irving's apex.

"The kid is special," said James. "We all know it we all see it and for him to go out and put up a performance like he did was in-

credible."

Let us count the ways: — Irving's stat line was almost otherworldly. He made 20 of 32 field goals, going 7 of 7 on 3-pointers. He went 10 of 10 from the free-throw line and added five assists, three rebounds and four steals in 46 minutes. Most of his baskets came on did-he-just-do-

that? drives to the rim, where he spun in layups with both hands.

— His 57 points were the most in the league this season, broke the Cavs' team record (James scored 56 in 2005), and tied the record for the most points against the Spurs at home, matching the 57 Golden State's Purvis Short laid on San An-

tonio back in 1984.

— Irving scored 16 points — 15 straight in one stretch, and Cleveland's last nine — in the fourth quarter. He added 11 more in overtime.

— With the Cavs down 110-107 in regulation, Irving knocked down an off-balance 3-pointer as the horn sounded to force OT.

"One of the best individual performances I've ever seen," the loquacious Barkley said during the TNT network's broadcast.

Irving's magical night would have been an afterthought if Spurs forward Kawhi Leonard hadn't clanked two free throws with 4.3 seconds left in regulation. Those misses set up perhaps Irving's finest moment, the game-tying 3-pointer from the right wing that sucked the air out of raucous AT&T Center.

Coming off a screen set at the top of the key from Tristan Thompson, Irving got separation from Tony Parker, caught the inbounds pass from James and took one dribble to the right. He rose and buried his jaw-dropping 3 over the extended arm of Leonard, who immediately flashed two fingers to the officials in a vain attempt to diminish Irving's clutch bucket — the signature field goal of the four-year guard's blossoming stardom.

"As long as my elbow's pointed at the rim, I feel like it has a great chance to go in," Irving said of his signature 3. "I learned that from Kobe Bryant."

The lessons he's getting from James are deeper.

The two have grown closer during their first season together and the look of pride on James' face following the game spoke to the bond they have developed. □

Rangers' Yu Darvish to have season-ending surgery Tuesday



In this Feb. 22, 2015, file photo, Texas Rangers pitcher Yu Darvish throws during spring training baseball practice in Surprise, Ariz.

SURPRISE, Ariz. (AP) — Yu Darvish said he didn't need any more opinions once the first doctor recommended season-ending surgery on the ailing right elbow of the Texas Rangers ace. The Japanese right-hander waited for two more reports anyway before the announcement that Dr. James Andrews will perform elbow ligament-replacement surgery on Tuesday in Gulf Breeze, Florida. Andrews was the last of three doctors to review images of the 28-year-old's elbow, following Rangers team physician Dr. Keith Meister and New York Mets medical director Dr. David Altchek. Tommy John surgery likely will sideline Darvish until early 2016. "Obviously it's a bump in a road for my career and obviously for the team that I'm not going to be able to throw," Darvish said Friday through an interpreter. "But there's a lot of positives that can come out of this."

From a Texas point of view, one of those positives is that Darvish will stay with the Rangers while he recovers from surgery rather than return to Japan. General manager Jon Daniels said Darvish should be back in Arizona by Wednesday night. "What was most important to us is that he would rehab in Texas and with the team, both from the standpoint of being with our people, so we could have our hands on him, but also from the standpoint of being with the club, around his teammates, around our staff," Daniels said. "Yu was totally on board with that." An MRI last week revealed a partially torn ligament and inflammation after Darvish felt tightness in his triceps while warming up for his spring training debut. He threw 10 of 12 pitches for strikes in his only inning before telling anyone about the discomfort. An All-Star in each of his three seasons since arriving from Japan, Darvish started last season on the disabled

list after experiencing neck stiffness in spring training. He missed only one start then, and was 10-7 with a 3.06 ERA in 22 starts and made his final appearance on Aug. 9 because of elbow inflammation. The elbow checked out fine during the offseason. "I didn't think this was going to happen," said Darvish, who will return with two years left on a six-year deal worth \$56 million, a deal signed after the Rangers agreed to pay almost \$52 million for his rights. "During that time, I thought it was nothing more than elbow inflammation." Daniels said Darvish could be back in the rotation by May 2016 and suggested it could be earlier. "Every rehab is a little different, so I'm not going to put a stopwatch on it," Daniels said. "Our goal is to get him back once with no setbacks. It's too early to put a date on it." Darvish is 39-25 in 83 starts for the Rangers, with 680 strikeouts in 545 1-3 innings. He led the majors with 277

strikeouts in 2013. First-year manager Jeff Banister reiterated that he's now trying to fill two rotation spots behind right-handers Yovani Gallardo and Colby Lewis and lefty Derek Holland. And he's already looking forward to next season, when he figures to fill out a lineup card with Darvish's name on it for the first time. "We'll leave the light on for him," Banister said.

Darvish said he never felt pain in his elbow, but doctors warned that a thinning of the ligament put him at risk of a more significant tear if he tried to pitch after several months of rest without surgery. "I have no worries whatsoever," Darvish said. "I feel like during this time there are a lot of things I can do to make myself better, knowing this is going to make me better." □

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De Jonge takes 1-shot lead at Innisbrook

DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

PALM HARBOR, Fla. (AP) —

Brendon de Jonge rolled in a pair of long putts on his way to a 2-under 69 and the 36-hole lead Friday in the Valspar Championship. Based on the holes remaining, he is halfway home to his first PGA Tour title.

Considering how many players are still in the mix — essentially everyone who made the cut — the weekend might feel even longer.

Only seven shots separated de Jonge from the players who made the cut on the number, the first time the first-to-worst gap has been that small since the 2011 British Open at Royal St. George's.

"Obviously, gives you a good chance for the weekend," de Jonge said. He was at 6-under 136, the highest score to lead after 36 holes at Innisbrook in six years.

De Jonge said that after he finished his round in the morning, uncertain how hard the wind would blow and who might get hot with the putter. The wind died, no one could sustain a great round without a few mistakes and he had the 36-hole lead for the fourth time in his career.

But not by much.

Jordan Spieth made a birdie putt from the fringe on the 18th for a 4-under 67 to match the best score of the round. Henrik Stenson,

playing the Copperhead course for the first time and apparently enjoying it, made eagle on his first hole and wound up with a 70.

They were one shot behind, along with Ryan Moore (68), Kevin Streelman (69) and Derek Ernst (70).

Ernst, who had only one round in the 60s this year,

joined Moore and Streelman as the only players to break 70s for both rounds. He was two shots behind, along with Sean O'Hair (72), Ricky Barnes (72) and Ian Poulter (70). Poulter hasn't been to Innisbrook since 2010, and he was asked what had kept him away.

he played, and so he instructed his caddie to never allow him to return. Seven holes into his pro-am round, he said he told his caddie, "What the ... was I doing not being here?" Justin Thomas (72) and Vijay Singh (70) were in the group at 3-under 139, with Luke Donald (68), Matt

off at a golf tournament since the 2012 Byron Nelson Championship.

What makes Innisbrook so mysterious is that players are irritated by the shots they left out on the course, only to realize they're not in bad shape. Such was the case of Stenson, who made a 25-foot eagle on his opening hole, a 20-foot birdie putt on his final hole and nothing but pars and two bogeys in between.

"I didn't get it close enough to give myself too many birdies," Stenson said. "All in all, pretty pleased."

Spieth rammed in a 20-foot birdie on the third hole that he said left a ball mark on the back of the cup. So that was a good break. He made a 30-foot birdie on No. 6 and rolled it in from 18 feet on the final hole. That was enough to put him in the final group, even if he's not sure how he got there.

"This is one of those random places where you feel like you should have shot better than you did, but you're not out of it," he said. "You can make birdies. The problem is there is trouble around every corner."

There was even trouble in the fairway. Early in the round, Charley Hoffman stopped when he saw a 10-foot alligator walking across the third fairway.

"We weren't going anywhere fast," Hoffman said. "And neither were we." □



Brendon de Jonge hits from the sixth tee during the second round of the Valspar Championship golf tournament Friday, March 13, 2015, at Innisbrook in Palm Harbor, Fla.

Associated Press

ran off five straight birdies around the turn to reach 8-under par until he started missing greens, missing putts and making bogeys to fall one shot behind de Jonge.

"Starting the day if you told me I would have shot 1 under I would have been very happy with it," Ernst said.

Lucas Glover had a 69 and

"Because I'm a buffoon," Poulter said. "I mean, stupid. This golf course I can compete on because it's fiddly, it's position off the tee, small greens, need to chip it well, good pace putting when you're above the hole. All those things I do well."

Poulter recalls the greens being sloppy the last time

Kuchar (70) and Patrick Reed (68) among those four behind.

Adam Scott is about the only guy who doesn't have a chance because he didn't make the cut. Scott missed four putts from inside 5 feet on his way to a 75 and missed the cut by three shots. It's the first time he had the weekend

Brewers ban high fives to avoid spread of pink eye

PEORIA, Arizona (AP) —

The Milwaukee Brewers will have to find a new way to celebrate for the next few spring training games because they banned high fives to avoid the spread of pink eye. Catcher Jonathan Lucroy and pitching coach Rick Kranitz became the latest victims on Thursday. They will stay home for 48 hours in hopes of stopping the spread of the annoying and highly contagious malady.

"We've been going

through it for a while, and it seems like a couple of more show up every day," manager Ron Roenicke said. The team won't high five until the outbreak is over. The Brewers play the Seattle Mariners on Friday. □

In this Sept. 24, 2014, file photo, Milwaukee Brewers starting pitcher Kyle Lohse, left, is congratulated by catcher Jonathan Lucroy, center, after the Brewers defeated the Cincinnati Reds 5-0 in a baseball game in Cincinnati.

Associated Press



At odds with Google, US seeks new rule on computer access

ERIC TUCKER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

The U.S. Justice Department is at odds with Google and privacy groups over the government's push to make it easier to locate and hack into computers in criminal investigations, a simmering conflict with constitutional and policy implications.

Federal prosecutors say better tools are needed to track down computer users who hide their locations while committing crimes on the Internet. But civil libertarians fear that the proposal, now under consideration by a federal advisory committee, would grant the government expansive new powers to reach into computers across the country.

The proposal would change existing rules of criminal procedure that, with limited exceptions, permit judges to approve warrants for property searches only in the districts where they serve. The government says those rules are outdated in an era when child pornographers, drug traffickers and others can mask their whereabouts on computer networks that offer anonymity. That technology can impede or thwart efforts to pinpoint a suspect's geographic location.

The Justice Department wants the rules changed so that judges in a district where "activities related to a crime" have occurred could approve warrants to search computers, even those outside their districts. The government says that flexibility is needed for cases in which the government can't figure out the location of a computer and needs a warrant to access it remotely, and for investigations involving botnets — networks of computers infected with a virus that spill across judicial districts. There are 94 federal judicial districts



In this Feb. 12, 2015 file photo, FBI Director James Comey speaks at Georgetown University in Washington. Associated Press

in the country — at least one in every state, and as many as four in some. "There is a substantial public interest in catching and prosecuting criminals who use anonymizing technologies, but locating them can be impossible for law enforcement absent the ability to conduct a remote search of the criminal's computer," Justice Department lawyers wrote in one memo. The advisory committee considering the rule change is meeting this month.

The proposal has generated fierce pushback from privacy organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, which say the rule change could violate a constitutional requirement that search warrant applications be specific about the property to be searched. They also say the proposal is unclear about exactly what type of information could be accessed by the government, and fails to guarantee the privacy of non-suspects who might have had access to the same computer as the target, or of innocent people who may themselves be victims of a botnet.

"What procedural protections are going to be in place when you do

these types of searches? How are they going to be limited?" asked Alan Butler, senior counsel at the Electronic Privacy Information Center.

Among the critics is Google, which says the proposal "raises a number of monumental and highly complex constitutional, legal and geopolitical concerns that should be left for Con-

gress to decide."

Privacy groups are also concerned that the proposal would lead to more frequent use by the FBI of surveillance technology that can be installed remotely on a computer to help pinpoint its location. Such tactics caught public attention last year when FBI Director James Comey acknowledged that in 2007 an agent

posing as an Associated Press reporter had sent to a bomb-threat suspect a link to an article that, once opened, revealed to investigators the computer's location and Internet address.

The Justice Department says such concerns are unfounded. It says the proposal simply makes sure that investigators have a judge to go to for a warrant in cases where they can't find a computer, and that the proposal would not provide the government with new technological authorities that it doesn't already have.

The proposal is before a criminal procedure advisory committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States — a panel made up of judges and lawyers — that meets twice a year, including this month. If approved, it will then be forwarded to the Supreme Court and ultimately to Congress, which does not have to approve it but can block it. It would take effect in December 2016. □

Going full circle for math and pastries on a special Pi day

SETH BORENSTEIN

AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sat-

urday is the day when love of math and a hankering for pastry come full circle. Saturday is Pi Day, a once-in-a-year calendar date that this time squares the fun with a once-in-a-century twist. Saturday is 3-14-15, in the form that Americans mark the calendar, the first five digits of the mathematical constant pi: 3.141592653. So the best time to celebrate is at 9:26 and 53 seconds. The next time that happens is in March 2115.

"It's a portal into this magical mysterious world of mathematics," said University of California mathematician Edward Fren-

kel. "Pi is special."

Pi is the constant used to calculate the area of a circle, as in pi times the radius squared, but it appears all over other parts of mathematics. It "is kind of a basic atomic building block" for math, said Temple University mathematician John Paulos, who was interviewed at precisely 3:14:15 p.m.

In some places, Pi Day is celebrated with the edible type of pie.

"It's a real exciting moment for math enthusiasm," said Nathan Kaplan, a Yale University math professor, who called it a time for people to "remember how much fun they found some of the stuff in school."

When challenged, Kaplan

acknowledged that most people don't really recall math as fun. He blamed that on the way we were taught: "There's fun stuff out there in the quantitative world."

One interesting aspect of pi is that it is irrational, which means the decimals after 3 go on to infinity with no repeating patterns. Yet in 1897, a bill before the Indiana legislature tried to round it up to 3.2. It fell flat.

"We cannot change it. It's not subject to opinion or taste or time," Frenkel said. "How many things like this in the universe mean the same thing to everyone through time and space?"

This pi story goes full circle, with exactly 314 words. □

Stocks decline for third week; Fed worries persist

KEN SWEET

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The stock market was hit hard Friday, capping a third week of declines, as investors reacted to a steep drop in oil prices and a jump in the value of the dollar.

Utilities, companies that make basic materials like steel, and major exporters had the biggest declines. The sell-off came at the end of a volatile week and sets the stage for a Federal Reserve policy meeting next week. Investors will be watching closely for clues about the central bank's views on the economy and interest rates.

"This week has really been about investors' outlooks adjusting in the face of higher interest rates later this year," said Gabriela Santos, a global market strategist at JPMorgan Funds.

The Dow Jones industrial average fell 145.91 points, or 0.8 percent, to 17,749.31. The Standard & Poor's 500 index lost 12.55 points, or 0.6 percent, to 2,053.40 and the Nasdaq composite lost 21.53 points, or 0.4 percent, to 4,871.76.

Oil dropped sharply after the International Energy Agency said prices had further to fall because supplies were continuing to rise. Benchmark U.S. crude fell \$2.21 to close at \$44.84 a barrel in New York. Oil is now within 40 cents of its low for the year, and its lowest level in six years, after a drop of 10 percent

this week. Brent crude, a benchmark for international oils used by many U.S. refineries, fell \$2.41 to close at \$54.67 a barrel in London. Several energy stocks followed the price of oil lower. Transocean, an offshore oil rig company, fell 67 cents, or 4.7 percent, to \$13.60 and Denbury Resources fell 29 cents, or 3.8 percent, to \$7.31. The U.S. dollar continued its advance against other major currencies. The euro declined 1.3 percent to \$1.0486. The U.S. dollar index, which measures the

two factors, strategists say. The U.S. economy is getting better, as seen by the strong jobs report last week, and the Federal Reserve is poised to raise interest rates sooner rather than later. In comparison, the European Central Bank is trying to drive down interest rates by buying government bonds, a tactic the Fed used until last fall. The ECB's program has been driving down the value of the euro. A higher dollar makes U.S. exports more expensive abroad. General Electric, Caterpil-

announced it would idle of its operations and lay off workers. U.S. Steel lost 83 cents to \$21.80.

"A rise in the dollar over a long period of time is fine, but this very rapid appreciation can directly impact companies' profits," Santos said. Stocks that pay higher dividends, such as utilities, also had big losses. The Dow Jones utility index fell 1 percent. That index is down 7.4 percent so far this year. A growing number of investors believe the Federal Reserve will raise its bench-



Traders gather at a post on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Friday, March 13, 2015. U.S. stocks closed lower a day after the market notched its best performance in five weeks.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew)

dollar against a group of other currencies, increased 0.8 percent Friday and is up 6.4 percent over the past month. The dollar's advance can be tied to

lar and Deere fell more than the rest of the market. U.S. Steel, whose products competes with cheap foreign imports, fell nearly 4 percent after the company

mark interest rate as early as June. Higher rates are typically bad for high-dividend stocks because it diminishes their appeal to investors seeking income. □

U.S. wholesale prices dip fourth month in a row

MARTIN CRUTSINGER

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) —

Wholesale prices fell for a fourth straight month in February as a decline in food prices offset an increase in gasoline prices.

The Labor Department said Friday its producer price index, which measures inflation pressures before they reach consumers, dropped 0.5 percent in February. The figure follows a 0.8 percent fall in January, which had been a record decline in a government series that goes back to 2009.

Core producer prices, which exclude volatile food and energy costs, also fell 0.5 percent during the month.

Over the past 12 months, producer prices have shed 0.6 percent while core prices have climbed a modest 1 percent.

Since last year inflation since has moved even farther below the Federal Reserve's goal of seeing prices rise about 2 percent annually.

Food costs were down 1.6 percent in February.

Energy costs overall were flat as declines in natural gas and electric power combined with a gain in gasoline, which rose 1.5 percent.

Gasoline prices had been falling since the middle of last year and hit a six-year low in January of \$2.03 a gallon, according to AAA. But since gas prices have risen since then, with the nationwide average for a gallon of regular now at \$2.45, up from \$2.23 a month.

Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics, said that about one-third of the drop in overall prices in February stemmed from a decline in profit margins at service stations. Those margins had risen for a time last year as gas stations took advantage of falling fuel costs to boost profits. But in February, the margins returned to more normal levels as gas prices rose. □

TiVo gets approval to buy some Aereo assets

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) —

TiVo said Friday that it has received bankruptcy court approval to buy some assets of Aereo, an online startup that offered a cheaper alternative to cable TV.

Financial terms were not disclosed. Aereo filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in November, less than five months after an unfavorable ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The company backed by media mogul Barry Diller allowed people to watch and record broadcast TV online for \$8 a month on tablets, phones and other gadgets. Unlike Hulu and other online video services, Aereo offered live streaming of broadcast channels. The Supreme Court ruled in the summer of 2014 that Aereo had been operating like a cable TV company, meaning that unless

it paid broadcasters licensing fees, it was in violation of copyright law. Aereo suspended its operations three days later. TiVo Inc. President and CEO Tom Rogers said in a statement Friday that the San Jose, California-based company will acquire Aereo's trademarks and customer lists. He said that it will help TiVo serve consumers that "want access to both broadcast television and over the top

content." TiVo's products include equipment to record TV shows for later viewing. TiVo said that the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Manhattan approved the transaction earlier this week as the last step in the sales process of Aereo's patents, hardware and other assets. Shares of TiVo slipped 2 cents to \$10.77 in morning trading. Its shares are down more than 15 percent over the past year. □

Ackman claims he hasn't been subpoenaed over Herbalife

NEW YORK (AP) — Activist investor Bill Ackman said Friday that he has not received any subpoenas to testify about possible market manipulation of Herbalife stock.

Ackman, who made the comments during a telephone interview on CNBC, runs Pershing Square Capital Management LP. He has bet heavily against Herbalife's stock, describing it as a pyramid scheme,

a characterization that the seller of supplements and weight-loss products rejects. The investor's comments come after The Wall Street Journal reported that federal prosecutors and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are looking into potential manipulation of Herbalife's stock and have talked to people hired by Ackman.

Ackman said that he is aware that a firm Pershing

has hired, Global Strategy Group, has received subpoenas and some individuals there have been interviewed. But he said he has not been subpoenaed.

Ackman maintained his view that Herbalife Ltd. is a pyramid scheme — making money by recruiting more salespeople instead of through selling products — and stood by the research his firm has conducted.

"We don't need to make

false statements about Herbalife," he said.

Ackman sent a letter to investors Friday that said he, nor Pershing Square, "intentionally made any false or misleading statements about Herbalife."

"We have publicly issued numerous presentations, white papers and analyses," he said.

Late Thursday Herbalife released a statement saying that Ackman has "a direct

financial interest in hurting our company." The company said that it's confident in the strong fundamentals of its business model.

Herbalife did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Friday on Ackman's latest comments. The company's shares rose \$4.48, or 13.8 percent, to \$37.73 in mid-day trading. Its shares are down about 34 percent over the past year. □

Alibaba's \$200M Snapchat deal said to put valuation at \$15B

**MIKE ISAAC
M. MERCED**

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Alibaba, the Chinese e-commerce giant, has invested \$200 million in Snapchat, according to two people with knowledge of the deal's terms.

Alibaba's investment values Snapchat, a 3 1/2-year-old messaging startup, at \$15 billion, according to one of these people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. It is a giant sum for Snapchat, a smartphone app that lets users send disappearing photos, videos and text messages to one another, and places the young company squarely among the most richly valued private tech companies in Silicon Valley. Many young Internet startups, some of which have produced little to no revenue, are raising hundreds of millions of dollars at soaring valuations. Nextdoor, a social networking company,

recently raised \$110 million at a \$1.1 billion valuation, though the company does not make any money.

Snapchat may have even grander ideas about its own worth. The company has recently fielded investment offers that could value the company at \$19 billion, according to a person with knowledge of the discussions. That valuation is nearly double the amount that it sought less than one year ago. Alibaba's \$200 million investment, which was first reported by Bloomberg, was not part of these recent talks, according to a person with knowledge of the deal. But the two companies have long sought to work together in some capacity, having spoken in the past about a potential investment. The investment gives Alibaba, whose e-commerce business dominates the Chinese consumer Internet, a chance to tap into a hot Western

company on the rise. It is another in a spree of investments in Western startups for Alibaba; last year, the company poured tens of

tens of millions of dollars into Tango, a messaging app, and invested more than \$100 million in Kabam, a popular mobile game studio. The investments, insiders say, give Alibaba new inroads into Silicon Valley and, po-

tentially, the early chance to spot - and invest in - the next hot startup.



People walk past a company logo at the Alibaba Group headquarters in Hangzhou, in eastern China's Zhejiang province.

(AP Photo)

For Snapchat, working with Alibaba could give

the young company valuable insight into China, a valuable market teeming with more than 1.3 billion potential customers. Snapchat gained some early notoriety as a place where young users can send nude

photos to one another, though its founders, Evan Spiegel and Bobby Murphy, have maintained this is not the intended purpose of the app. Recently, Snapchat has made many internal changes that have positioned it as a platform for watching rich media content. In January, Snapchat introduced a product called Discover, a section of the app where users can watch daily original content provided by companies like CNN, Vice, National Geographic and a handful of others.

It is also Snapchat's strongest attempt to make money from its service. Some of the content inside the Discover section includes advertising, the revenue from which is split between Snapchat and the media publisher, according to people with knowledge of the deal. Representatives of Alibaba and Snapchat declined to comment. □

Valeant said to be raising its bid for Salix pharmaceuticals

DAVID GELLES

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Valeant Pharmaceuticals plans to team with Pershing Square Capital Management and other top shareholders, including ValueAct Capital, to raise its bid for Salix Pharmaceuticals this weekend, according to people briefed on the matter.

The raised offer will be above \$160 a share and consist entirely of cash, these people said. The exact price of Valeant's new offer was not yet known

Friday. Valeant hopes that the increased offer will be enough to end a bidding war that has erupted over Salix, a maker of gastrointestinal drugs.

Valeant agreed to buy Salix for \$158 a share in cash, or about \$10 billion, last month. But earlier this week, the drug giant Endo International offered \$11.2 billion, or \$175 a share, mostly in stock, for Salix.

The Salix board is meeting Saturday to consider the rival offers, these people said.

While the Endo bid is higher, it also introduces several uncertainties to the sale process for Salix. Among the top concerns for analysts are the need for shareholder votes, a large stock component and the results of a pending treatment approval by the Food and Drug Administration.

Nonetheless, the Endo offer sent Salix shares trading substantially higher, making it difficult for Valeant to stand by its lower bid. Details of Valeant's new bid were still coming together

Friday. To finance the increased offer, Valeant is turning to top shareholders, including Pershing Square, the hedge fund run by William A. Ackman. Pershing Square and Valeant worked closely together for much of past year in an attempt to acquire Allergan, then maker of Botox. But Allergan was eventually acquired by Actavis, earning an enormous profit for Ackman but leaving Valeant with little to show for its efforts. This month, it emerged that Pershing

Square had taken a nearly 5 percent stake in Valeant but pledged to remain a passive investor.

Acquiring Salix would be a much-needed victory for Valeant. Speaking on CNBC on Friday, Ackman expressed confidence in Valeant and its chief executive, J. Michael Pearson.

"I know Mike Pearson very well," Ackman said. "I worked with him for a year. He's the most disciplined buyer of companies. He's not going to overpay for Salix." □

Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



'Perfectly healthy' Putin nowhere to be seen

NEIL MacFARQUHAR

© 2015 New York Times

MOSCOW - Where's Putin?

It was the question pre-occupying Moscow and much of Russia on Friday, as speculation mounted about why President Vladimir Putin had not been seen in public since last week.

He canceled a trip to Kazakhstan; postponed a treaty signing with representatives from South Ossetia who were reportedly told not to bother to come to Moscow; and, unusually, was absent from a meeting of top officials from the FSB, Russia's domestic intelligence service.

The last confirmed public sighting was at a meeting with Prime Minister Matteo Renzi of Italy on March 5 - although the Kremlin would have citizens think otherwise.

On Friday, the Kremlin released video and posted a still picture of Putin meeting

with the president of Russia's Supreme Court, but since the video was not live, questions lingered.

The simplest explanation appeared to come from an unidentified government source in Kazakhstan, who told Reuters "it looks like he has fallen ill."

But there also appeared to be a certain reluctance to concede that Russia's leader, who cultivates a macho image of being in good health at age 62, might have been felled like a mere mortal.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry S. Peskov, told any news media outlet that called (and most did) that his boss was in fine fettle, holding meetings and attending to his duties. "Perfectly healthy," Peskov told one news agency. "Fine," he told another.

Putin's predecessor, Boris N. Yeltsin, used to disappear frequently as well. □

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Study: Conservatives say they're happy, but liberals show it

SETH BORENSTEIN
AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Conservatives say they are happier, but liberals show more cheer in smiles, word choice and even emoticon use, claims a new U.S. scientific study.

Other researchers found fault with the study, which looked at how Democrats and Republicans differ in positive language in speeches entered into the Congressional Record, photos in the congressional directory, tweets by followers of the two different political parties, LinkedIn photos associated with advocacy groups, and answers to psychological satisfaction-with-life surveys. The scientists found Democrats in Congress and liberals in general used a statistically significant amount of more positive language and smiled more with their eyes in photographs, while conservatives self-reported more satisfaction with life, according to a study published in the peer-reviewed journal Science.

"We're not saying liberals are happier, they behave happier," said study co-author Peter Ditto, a professor of psychology at the University of California Irvine. "But conservatives report being happier."

Other studies have reported that conservatives tend to score higher on tests that rate how satisfied with life they are, but University

of California Irvine graduate student Sean Wojcik, the study's lead author, decided to look deeper.

parent regardless of who controlled Congress or the White House, Ditto said. For a laughing Rep. Gerry

reads "Fighting for Freedom and Having Fun." His spokesman Ken Grubbs said, "A day at the office

eral want less government so this would be reflected in the language they use when talking about government.

One study team member, who initially wasn't told what the project was about, examined congressional portraits to rate their facial emotions, an accepted technique in psychology. Democrats and Republicans had similar smiles around the mouth, but the more telling features for happiness are the muscles around the eyes and there Democrats looked cheerier, Wojcik said. He also found more positive language — and emoticon use — in tweets from people who followed only Democratic Twitter accounts versus only Republican account followers.

Several outside psychology experts told The Associated Press that while it was interesting, they didn't find the study convincing. They faulted some techniques, did not see a significant difference between the two ideologies' scores and they criticized the researchers for mixing long-term happiness in self-reporting with momentary good moods in pictures and language.

"The observed differences are quite small," said Robert Emmons of the University of California at Davis. "Happiness is the norm for both" Democrats and Republicans. □



In this March 25, 2014 file photo, Rep. Gerald E. Connolly, D-Va., disagrees with his colleague on the other side Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif., who spoke against H.R. 4278, the Ukraine Support Act, during the House Foreign Affairs Committee markup of the bill on Capitol Hill in Washington. Associated Press

He looked at other indicators of happiness: words and facial expressions. The researchers examined 18 years and 432 million words of speeches in the Congressional Record, concentrating on 2013. Democrats used 13.6 positive words for every negative and Republicans used 11.5 positive words per negative. That higher rate for liberals was ap-

Connolly, Democrat, this rings true: "A lot of what seems to fuel Republican energy is anger-based. They're angry about Iran. They're angry about Obama. ... And you hear that on the floor constantly."

That's not the feeling at the office of Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, a Republican, where a sign above the congressman's door

here ... is never without lots of laughs."

Political scientist Jack Pitney said the Wojcik study was so off kilter that it seemed to be a parody, adding "I don't think too many people will take this seriously." A professor at Claremont McKenna College, he had many questions about the way the study was conducted and said conservatives in gen-

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'Fashion Police' without Joan Rivers isn't 'Fashion Police'

FRAZIER MOORE

AP Television

NEW YORK (AP) — "Fashion Police" isn't working, isn't funny and isn't condoned (at least, by some) for one simple reason: Joan Rivers isn't there.

Rivers was the host in whose time-honored image "Fashion Police" was forged. Until her death at age 81 last summer, she made it required viewing for anyone looking to keep up with celebrities' kooky couture while the accompanying potshots took those stars down a peg.

As host, Rivers was resolutely who she was throughout her long career: fearless, unapologetic and hilarious. She dished it out — and she took it. And her panel of "Joan Rangers" followed her lead.

With her death came the inevitable question: Could "Fashion Police" continue in her absence?

In January, E! Entertainment brought it back as a series of specials with Kathy Griffin as the new host, joined by the returning Kelly Osbourne and Giuliana Rancic, with Brad Goreski replacing George Kotsiopoulos, and Melissa Rivers, Joan's daughter, remaining its executive producer. On Thursday, Griffin took to Twitter to announce she was gone.

She had stayed for just sev-

en episodes.

That was two weeks after Osbourne made her own brisk exit following Rancic's red-carpet gibe about biracial singer-actress Zendaya's dreadlocks. Rancic had joked that they suggested the smell of marijuana. Zendaya accused her of racism. Rancic duly apologized. But Osbourne piled on with criticism of her own, then cut and ran. On Friday, she was tweeting congratulations to Griffin for likewise bailing out: "I could not be more proud of you."

Other celebs chimed in.

"Proud of u!!!" tweeted Rosie O'Donnell. "Cheers for doing what you think is right," echoed "Parks and Recreation" actress Aubrey Plaza. Jane Lynch hailed her as "my brave and courageous friend."

And columnist Meghan McCain tweeted that she was "super impressed with the reasoning Kathy Griffin gave for leaving fashion police."

What was that reasoning? In her statement, Griffin said, in part, "I do not want to use my comedy to contribute to a culture of unattainable perfectionism and intolerance towards difference," adding that her goal is "to help women, gay kids, people of color and anyone who feels underrepresented to have

a voice and a LAUGH!"

"My style does not fit with the creative direction of the show," she concluded. Maybe not. But this sweeping reappraisal was like explaining that you ditched your bartending job because you suddenly realized they make you sell alcohol.

Or, to quote Piers Morgan's tweet: "Kathy Griffin's quit 'Fashion Police' because she doesn't like their mean humour? Ironically, one of the few times she's ever made me laugh."

Indeed, her parting manifesto would suggest she had never seen "Fashion Police" in its glory days, when it was hosted by Rivers, her friend and mentor. On one show, Rivers skewered a baggy, dizzyingly hued Alexander McQueen jumpsuit worn by actress Marion Cotillard by saying, "The pattern looks like Precious sat on somebody's butterfly collection."

Or, as another relatively mild example, a dress worn by Jessica Alba sparked this salvo: "Last thing I saw that was that full and yellow was one of Hugh Hefner's diapers."

No doubt, Griffin has made a sensible departure from "Fashion Police," a gig this otherwise accomplished comedian clearly wasn't suited for. But her decision to leave has been inexplic-



This April 30, 2012 file photo shows comedian and TV host Joan Rivers from the show "Fashion Police" and her producer daughter Melissa Rivers at an E! Network upfront event in New York. Associated Press

cably greeted with thundering applause ("Thanks for being WHO YOU ARE," saluted Kristin Chenoweth on Twitter).

Since when does making a practical career move, especially when you're bombing, warrant canonization? Griffin, like Os-

bourne, has merely chosen to abandon a sinking ship (a ship, despite their best efforts, they helped run aground). There's no higher moral purpose behind their retreat.

(Griffin and Melissa Rivers declined to comment for this article.) □



In this Jan. 14, 2015 file photo, actress Juliette Lewis arrives at the Disney/ABC Television Group 2015 Winter TCA Party in Pasadena, Calif. Associated Press

ALICIA RANCILIO

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — With so many movie stars flocking to the small screen, Juliette Lewis, who has a long list

of film credits including "Cape Fear" and "From Dusk Till Dawn," says she resisted taking a TV role for a long time.

"It was a very grown-up

Juliette Lewis says TV role is 'strange and challenging'

decision for me to take a series," said Lewis, 41, in a recent interview, who confessed to having a "fear of playing one character for potentially years."

What made it OK to sign on to ABC's "Secrets and Lies" (airing Sundays at 9 p.m. Eastern) was the challenge of playing a homicide detective.

"She's never comfortable for me to play. It's so different from myself and that's what makes it exciting and strange and challenging," she said.

Lewis' character, police Detective Andrea Cor-

nell, is investigating the death of a young boy. She believes Ben Crawford, played by Ryan Phillippe, may be the killer.

"I relate to her obsessive nature because to be a homicide detective you have to be slightly obsessive. You're sleeping, eating, dreaming the case until it's solved. ... They can't afford to be emotionally involved yet their whole pulse is about this case. I understand that as a creative personality, especially when you're younger, your whole drive to do anything artistically

is all against the odds. You have to sort of be a bit obsessive about that and relentless. I also understand (the meaning of) a work ethic from a very young age," she said with a laugh.

"Being in show business, you can't have a sick day. ... If you take a sick day you are costing so many people money."

The murder on this season of "Secrets and Lies" will be solved. Lewis said if the show is picked up for a second season, her character will work on a different case. □

'Better Call Saul' plays game of Easter eggs with audience

FRAZIER MOORE

AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Every week, the hunt is on.

When each "Better Call Saul" episode hits the air (Mondays at 10 p.m. EDT on AMC), a certain segment of its audience answers the call, not just savoring each hour of duplicity by lawyer Jimmy McGill, but also scouring the screen for covert clues.

This pursuit of so-called Easter eggs isn't unique to "Saul," or even to TV. Throughout his long career as a movie director, Alfred Hitchcock in effect cast himself as an Easter egg, popping up in each of his films in a blink-and-you'd-miss-it cameo appearance.

But since premiering last month, "Saul" has emerged not only as TV's most beguiling tragicomedy, but also a favorite hunting ground for high-alert Easter eggheads.

Many of its buried clues link "Saul" to "Breaking Bad," the 2008-13 AMC series that introduced Jimmy McGill in a time frame six years after the starting point for "Saul." For instance, in



In this image released by AMC, Bob Odenkirk portrays lawyer Jimmy McGill, before taking on the pseudonym Saul Goodman, in a scene from "Better Call Saul." Associated Press

the "Saul" premiere, Jimmy's car was revealed to be a 1998 Suzuki Esteem rattletrap parked in the Albuquerque courthouse alongside a Cadillac DeVille — a deliberate reference to the make of car he will drive years later on "Breaking Bad" in his alter ego as flush attorney Saul Goodman.

On another "Saul" occasion, a fleeting close-up of a letter to Jimmy displayed a home address on Juan

Tabo Boulevard, which quick-witted viewers recalled as, years later, the residential street of nerdy chemist Gale Boetticher, lab assistant to Walter White ("Breaking Bad" star Bryan Cranston) in producing his top-notch crystal meth.

Detecting such needles in the "Saul" haystack calls for sharp eyes, a good memory and much replaying and still-framing with your DVR.

Or you can just Google the words "Saul" and "egg" to benefit from numerous fan sites and the lists of Easter eggs you'll find compiled there. Be prepared to be humbled by the clues you missed buried deep in plain sight.

"Better Call Saul" is ideally suited for embedding these clues. Like "Breaking Bad," which spawned it, "Saul" is fearless in its refusal to tell a simple tale in straightforward, linear style. Hopscotch storytelling is the rule, with out-of-nowhere information deposited that might not be explained for weeks to come.

In short, the series rejects the notion that its audience "needs every piece of information planted very firmly, and that, if something isn't said out loud, the audience won't get it," says co-producer and -creator Peter Gould, who oversees the show in tandem with former "Breaking Bad" mastermind Vince Gilligan.

"We're making the show for an audience that's paying attention," says Gould, and if it seems like they have fun keeping the audience on its toes, well, they sure do, he declares.

Item: "When Vince was selecting the key fob that Jimmy uses for his Esteem, we thought it would be fun to use one similar to the one Walter White used to trigger his machine-gun

ambush at the end of 'Breaking Bad.'"

Bravo to the viewers who noticed!

And what about the so-called Billboard Guy, who conspired with Jimmy in a heroism ruse in Episode 4 — and who eagle-eyed viewers recognized from two weeks earlier.

"We wanted to plant an explanation for how Jimmy met the guy he would use later in his scammy billboard rescue," says Gould. "Very, very close observers of episode number 2 saw him as one of the clients Jimmy was appointed to represent."

The character was played by actor-stuntman Eddie Fernandez, who, before his big scene in Episode 4, had to be specially flown from Los Angeles to Albuquerque for that three-second shot of him emerging from a courtroom with Jimmy in Episode 2.

"I'm so pleased that people noticed," says Gould, "because we did go to some trouble to plant him in that episode."

An Easter egg like that demands a lot of planning and logistics. But others can happen on the fly, sometimes proving as much a surprise to Gould and Gilligan as to the viewers who catch them.

Item: When Jimmy placed a call on a sidewalk pay phone in Episode 3, a squiggly graffiti tag on its face plate said "JPI" — the likely signature of Jesse Pinkman, who (played by Aaron Paul) Walter teamed with throughout "Breaking Bad" on their chemical adventures and, during the time span of prequel "Saul," would have been an up-to-no-good teen.

"That wasn't in the script," Gould confides with a laugh. "Sometimes folks in the art department or on the set add a little something."

The goal is to make the series' warped universe "as consistent and as real to us, and to the audience, as we possibly can," he says. With a bonus payoff for those who really pay attention. □

3 Dog Night keyboardist Jimmy Greenspoon dies

DERRIK J. LANG

AP Entertainment Writer

Jimmy Greenspoon, the keyboardist for rock band Three Dog Night, has died. He was 67.

Greenspoon's agent, Chris Burke, said he died Wednesday of cancer at his home in North Potomac, Maryland, surrounded by his family. The keyboardist joined the rock band in 1968 and had been working with them until last October, when he took a medical leave of absence to pursue treatment for metastatic melanoma.

"He was like a brother to me," Three Dog Night co-founder and vocalist Danny Hutton said in a statement. "I knew him since he was just a teenager, and he was my oldest

friend in the band. Also, Jimmy was a critical part of our early history, bringing a sound to the band that helped develop our style; he left an indelible mark."

The group is best known for its 1960s and 1970s hits "Joy to the World," "Mama Told Me (Not to Come)" and "Black and White." Throughout his career, Greenspoon also performed with artists like Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and the Beach Boys.

"I will be forever shattered by his death," band co-founder and vocalist Cory Wells said. "Jimmy cared so much about excellence in the music and always made sure we had what we needed on stage and in the recording studio. I was amazed by his



This June 2014 photo provided by Three Dog Night shows keyboard player, Jimmy Greenspoon, an original member of the rock band, Three Dog Night.

Associated Press

photographic memory, his love for music."

Greenspoon is survived by his wife, Susie, daughter, Heather Miller, and two granddaughters. □

The Cost of Relativism



DAVID BROOKS

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One of America's leading political scientists, Robert Putnam, has just come out with a book called "Our Kids" about the growing chasm between those who live in college-educated America and those who live in high-school-educated America. It's got a definitive collection of data about this divide. Roughly 10 percent of the children born to college grads grow up in single-parent households. Nearly 70 percent of children born to high school grads do. There are a bunch of charts that look like open scissors. In the 1960s or 1970s, college-educated and noncollege-educated families behaved roughly the same. But since then, behavior patterns have ever more sharply diverged. High-school-educated parents dine with their children less than college-educated parents, read to them less, talk to them less, take them to church less, encourage them less and spend less time engaging in developmental activity. Interspersed with these statistics, Putnam and his research team profile some of the representative figures from each social class. The profiles from high-school-educated America are familiar but horrific.

David's mother was basically absent. "All her boyfriends have been nuts," he said. "I never really got to see my mom that much." His dad dropped out of school, dated several women with drug problems and is now in prison. David went to seven different elementary schools. He ended up under house arrest and got a girl pregnant before she left him for a drug addict.

Kayla's mom married an abusive man but lost custody of their kids to him when they split. Her dad married a woman with a child but left her after it turned out the child was fathered by her abusive stepfather. Kayla grew up as one of five half-siblings from three relationships until her parents split again and coupled with others.

Elijah grew up in a violent neighborhood and saw a girl killed in a drive-by shooting when he was 4. He burned down a lady's house when he was 13. He goes through periods marked by drugs, clubbing and sex but also dreams of being a preacher. "I just love beating up somebody," he told a member of Putnam's team, "and making

they nose bleed and just hurting them and just beating them on the ground."

The first response to these stats and to these profiles should be intense sympathy. We now have multiple generations of people caught in recurring feedback loops of economic stress and family breakdown, often leading to something approaching an anarchy of the intimate life.

But it's increasingly clear that sympathy is not enough. It's not only money and better policy that are missing in these circles; it's norms. The health of society is primarily determined by the habits and virtues of its citizens. In many parts of America there are no minimally agreed upon standards for what it means to be a father. There are no basic codes and rules woven into daily life, which people can absorb unconsciously and follow automatically.

Reintroducing norms will require, first, a moral vocabulary. These norms weren't destroyed because of people with bad values. They were destroyed by a plague of nonjudgmentalism, which refused to assert that one way of behaving was better than another. People got out of the habit of setting standards or understanding how they were set.

Next it will require holding people responsible. People born into the most chaotic situations can still be asked the same questions: Are you living for short-term pleasure or long-term good? Are you living for yourself or for your children? Do you have the freedom of self-control or are you in bondage to your desires?

Next it will require holding everybody responsible. America is obviously not a country in which the less educated are behaving irresponsibly and the more educated are beacons of virtue. America is a country in which privileged people suffer from their own characteristic forms of self-indulgence: the tendency to self-segregate, the comprehensive failures of leadership in government and industry. Social norms need repair up and down the scale, universally, together and all at once.

People sometimes wonder why I've taken this column in a spiritual and moral direction of late. It's in part because we won't have social repair unless we are more morally articulate, unless we have clearer definitions of how we should be behaving at all levels.

History is full of examples of moral revival, when social chaos was reversed, when behavior was tightened and norms reasserted. It happened in England in the 1830s and in the U.S. amid economic stress in the 1930s. It happens through organic communal effort, with voices from everywhere saying gently: This we praise. This we don't.

Every parent loves his or her children. Everybody struggles. But we need ideals and standards to guide the way. □



Race, History, a President, a Bridge



CHARLES M. BLOW

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As our van in the presidential motorcade reached the crest of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, and began the descent toward the thousands of waiting faces and waving arms of those who had come to commemorate the 50th anniversary of "Bloody Sunday," the gravity of that place seized me, pushing out the breath and rousing the wonder.

The mind imagines the horror of that distant day: the scrum of bodies and the cloud of gas, the coughing and trampling, the screaming and wailing, the batons colliding with bones, the opening of flesh, the running down of blood.

In that moment I understood what was necessary in President Barack Obama's address: to balance celebration and solemnity, to honor the heroes of the past but also to motivate the activists of the moment, to acknowledge how much work had been done but to remind the nation that that work was not complete.

(I, along with a small group of other journalists, had been invited by the White House to accompany the president to Selma and have a discussion with him during the flight there.) About an hour north of where the president spoke was Shelby County, whose suit against the Department of Justice the Supreme Court had used to gut

the same Voting Rights Act that Bloody Sunday helped to pass. His speech also came after several shootings of unarmed black men, whose deaths caused national protests and racial soul-searching.

It came on the heels of the Justice Department's report on Ferguson, Missouri, which found pervasive racial bias and an oppressive use of fines primarily against African-Americans.

It came as a CNN/ORC poll found that 4 out of 10 Americans thought race relations during the Obama presidency had gotten worse, while only 15 percent thought they had gotten better.

The president had to bend the past around so it pointed toward the future. To a large degree, he accomplished that goal. The speech was emotional and evocative. People cheered. Some cried.

And yet there seemed to me something else in the air: a lingering - or gathering - sense of sadness, a frustration born out of perpetual incompleteness, an anger engendered by the threat of regression, a pessimism about a present and future riven by worsening racial understanding and interplay.

To truly understand the Bloody Sunday inflection point - and the civil rights movement as a whole - one must appreciate the preceding century.

After the Civil War, blacks were incredibly populous in Southern states. They were close to, or exceeded, half the population in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Virginia, Mississippi, Louisiana and South Carolina.

During Reconstruction, the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments were ratified, abolishing slavery, granting citizenship and equal protection to former slaves and extending the vote to black men. As a result, "some 2,000 African-Americans held public office, from the local level all the way up to the U.S. Senate," according to the television channel History.

This was an assault on the tra-

ditional holders of power in the South, who responded aggressively. The structure of Jim Crow began to form. The Ku Klux Klan was born, whose tactics would put the Islamic State group to shame.

Then in the early 20th century came the first wave of the Great Migration, in which millions of Southern blacks would decamp for the North, East and West.

This left a smaller black population in Southern states that had developed and perfected a system to keep those who remained suppressed and separate.

Here, the civil rights movement and Bloody Sunday played out. The movement was about justice and equality, but in a way it was also about power - the renewed fear of diminished power, the threat of expanded power, the longing for power denied.

Now, we must look at the hundred years following the movement to understand that another inflection point is coming, one that again threatens traditional power: the browning of America.

According to the Census Bureau, "The U.S. is projected to become a majority-minority nation for the first time in 2043," with minorities projected to be 57 percent of the population in 2060. In response, fear and restrictive laws are creeping back into our culture and our politics - not always explicitly or violently, but in ways whose effects are similarly racially arrayed.

Structural inequities - economic, educational - are becoming more rigid, and systemic biases harder to eradicate. But this time the threat isn't regional and racially binary but national and multifaceted.

So, we must fight our fights anew.

As the president told a crowd in South Carolina on Friday, "Selma is not just about commemorating the past." He continued, "Selma is now." □

At Georgia State, a Father and Son Tread a Fine Line

MIKE TIERNEY

© 2015 New York Times

ATLANTA - Four years ago, high school basketball standout R.J. Hunter entered his mother's bedroom in Indianapolis and interrupted her sleep with some news: He would cast his college basketball lot with Georgia State.

Delivering the scoop by phone to his father prompted the boilerplate parental

Besides, R.J. might fortify his father's job stability at program that was foundering and largely ignored.

But as the journey apparently approaches the finish line, the Hunters are experiencing a hodgepodge of emotions that have complicated what at first seemed an ideal situation. R.J. Hunter has second-guessed himself as player and son. Ron Hunter struggled to

regretted R.J.'s choice, but each was relieved that the pressure at home would soon dissipate.

"Honestly, as much as I've loved coaching my son, which has been one of the best blessings in my life, if you asked could you do it again, I don't know," Ron Hunter said at practice as the first-seeded Panthers (22-9) prepared for the Sun Belt Conference tourna-

Jim Larranaga, now at Miami, coached his two sons at previous stops. Virginia coach Tony Bennett graduated from Green Bay, where his father, Dick, worked, as its career scoring leader. One of the most accomplished duos completed their alliance only a year ago, when Doug McDermott of Creighton was the consensus player of the year under the guidance

without always agreeing. One standard line of advice: Trust his coaching instincts because "he knows you better than anyone else."

"Sometimes," said R.J., who considered transferring, "I'd get mad at her. You want her to be on your side." While Ron Hunter demanded more from his son than of his teammates, he was careful not to show it as he did years earlier.

When R. J. Hunter was 10, his father threw hitting practice for the youth baseball team. He tossed underhanded to everyone but his son. The others swung at underhanded tosses. With his son, "It was overhanded, 90 miles an hour," he said. R.J. Hunter quit the sport that day.

Neither father nor son was fully prepared for awkwardness on issues as simple as how R.J. should address him. For a week, they tried "Coach" until the title was abandoned.

"When he needed a hug, I couldn't do that," Ron Hunter said. "I couldn't be Dad. I needed to be the coach."

As all athletes do away from games and practices, the Panthers would gripe about their coaches. R.J. decided to take a cue from Doug McDermott, now a Chicago Bulls rookie, who told his Creighton teammates when they vented about Greg to not withhold their feelings.

"They start talking, and I listen," R.J. Hunter said. "Sometimes I'm the one complaining."

After Saturday's victory against Georgia Southern, the ever-demonstrative Ron Hunter resembled an angry bull, sprinting toward the Georgia State student section that contributed to the program's third sellout ever - the first was inspired by a postgame Jay Leno performance years ago - and pounding his chest. It was more than a gesture of thanks to supporters who drowned out a sizable Georgia Southern contingent, which displayed a sign that read, "If my dad was coach, I'd start too." □



Following a victory over Georgia Southern, Georgia State head coach Ron Hunter and his son R.J. watch a video celebrating the team's season at GSU Sports Arena in Atlanta, March 7, 2015. Hunter, a high-school standout who committed to the college team his father coaches, is projected as a late first-round NBA draft pick.

(Kevin Liles/The New York Times)

response: Sleep on it, and let's revisit the decision tomorrow.

Ron Hunter immediately wished he could retract those words, seeing as how he was the Panthers' coach.

"I was mad at myself, thinking, 'I shouldn't have done that,'" he said.

R.J. stuck by his decision, delighting his parents. Not only would the three reunite in Atlanta, Ron Hunter's home-away-from-home for the past year, but they would get a close-up perspective of R.J.'s transition to college life that most parents of top athletes are denied.

balance the dual roles of father and coach.

Amy Hunter, the mother and spouse, has spent plenty of days consoling R.J., debating and even arguing with her husband and defending both in this tangled intersection of relationships.

So when R.J., a 6-foot-6 junior who is projected as a late first-round NBA draft pick, locked himself in a lingering courtside embrace with Ron Hunter on Saturday in what was probably his final home game, neither man could stop the tears, nor could Amy Hunter as she watched from the stands. None of them

ment this week.

"If I were in R.J.'s shoes," he added, "I couldn't have played for my dad."

Familial collaborations are not uncommon in college basketball. Pete Maravich said he would have been barred from the house forever had he not joined his father, Press, at Louisiana State. The New York Knicks alumnus Allan Houston took patriarchal direction at Tennessee. The highlight of Homer Drew's distinguished coaching career at Valparaiso was son Bryce's NCAA tournament buzzer-beater that remains a staple in TV promotions for the tournament.

of his father, Greg.

In his freshman year, R.J. vented frequently in person and via text message to Amy Hunter about perceived harsh treatment from his father, whose soft-spoken child-rearing contrasts with his shouting in the gym.

"The first time I got yelled at, it was weird," recalled R.J. Hunter, who had fielded offers from teams in the five major conferences. "I didn't know how he was as a coach. He gets on everybody." Amy Hunter recognized that, for R.J., the line between father and coach became blurred. She listened and commiserated